

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Instructional Systems Program

**TO MAKE THEIR JOURNEY BETTER:
RESEARCH-FOCUSED ASPIRATIONS FOR PREPARING ADULT VOLUNTEERS
FOR FACILITATING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

A Dissertation in
Instructional Systems

by

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ABSTRACT

This basic interpretive qualitative research study explored the personal and professional backgrounds, training experiences, perspectives, and perceptions held by adult volunteers serving as crew advisors in the Venturing program of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Venturing is the BSA's adventure oriented youth development program for coeds age 14-through-20. Upon joining a Venturing crew, youth members are known as Venturers, and the top adult volunteer of the crew is the crew advisor. According to the aims and mission of the BSA, crew advisors are expected to facilitate the positive development of her/his crew's Venturers, yet an analysis of the basic training provided to crew advisors suggests that skills related to the facilitation of positive youth development are not a part of the training curriculum. In order to identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that would support a crew advisor's ability to facilitate the positive development of the Venturers in her/his crew, primary data were obtained from a three-interview series with five Venturing crew advisors residing in Mid-Atlantic States of the USA who were considered by their peers and by the researcher to be relatively successful at delivering the Venturing program. Other data were obtained by observations of crew advisor trainings and interviews with professionals from other youth organizations responsible for adult volunteer training. Data analysis described four capabilities that appear to be present in relatively successful crew advisors, assessed crew advisors' willingness and ability to utilize a youth development resource produced outside of the BSA (the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents), and a suggested training scheme for preparing adult volunteers for supporting positive youth development within their youth-focused programs and organizations. Ultimately, this research presents suggestions for optimizing the training and preparation of adult volunteers to improve the efficacy of the Venturing program for facilitating the positive youth development of its Venturers. Written as a scholarly personal narrative, the researcher's personal and professional

background, including 23 years of experience as a member and volunteer of the BSA, provided context for the inquiry and a frame of reference for the data analysis.

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My family, the Kirbys and Baileys from Albion, New York, have always fueled my curiosity and encouraged my pursuits. The addition of my wife Rebecca to the family has made my latter years of graduate school far more pleasant than if I had completed the journey alone. Rebecca's love and hard work has provided me with opportunities that range well beyond what most full-time graduate students ever have available during that stage of their lives. Rebecca's family, the Morgans from McMechen, West Virginia, are also greatly appreciated for their ongoing support and care.

I have friends in many circles, and the closest of them have endured some type of hardship with me. As far as the hardship of graduate school, I am indebted to my colleagues from the Instructional Systems Program and other units of Penn State University because these people know that to give is to receive, and they have given me their time, energy, and resources even when they had their own similarly pressing deadlines and demands for their attention. I am equally indebted to my friends from the Boy Scouts of America and other Scouting programs across the world, especially because they not only humor my commentary but also share the same

passion to advocate for the youth and emerging adults of the local communities where we live, distant communities we have never visited, and for the Scout movement as a whole. My newest Scouting friends are the ten crew advisors who were participants in the research reported herein. I am truly grateful for them as they gave me many hours of their time and their intelligent, enthusiastic dialogue that will be of benefit to me for many years into the future.

My teachers at every level of education have always allowed me to become a special case, either by humoring my requests or guiding me into unique directions. The vision of my own teaching will be to model the extraordinary efforts of those who have taught me. This research study is also the product of the advisement and encouragement of my faculty committee, as well as of the college and university course instructors who have prepared me for my own service, teaching, and research in academe or other educational institutions.

Lastly, I want to thank the countless people of Penn State University who contributed to the myriad opportunities and resources I have received as a result of my graduate school education, research experience, and employment responsibilities. Each of those opportunities and resources were gifts that I may never be able to repay, but I will always regard them as special and uplifting within my personal history. To each staff member, faculty member, course instructor, and administrator, please know that I sincerely appreciate all that you have provided to me.

Chapter 1

Prologue: What Are You Reading?

The document that you are reading right now is the report I have written about a research project that I imagined, planned, proposed, and conducted, and it represents a capstone on 13 years of education after high school, and 23 years of involvement in the youth movement known as Scouting. In academic circles this document is known as a dissertation, defined by the online dictionary WordNet 3.0 as “a treatise advancing a new point of view resulting from research” (Princeton University, 2010). This dictionary definition already raises an important point in just the second sentence you have read in this document, because I, Joshua Aaron Kirby, the author, the person who currently controls everything you will read in this document, have made at least three critical decisions surrounding that simple dictionary definition. First, I chose to actually include a dictionary definition in an effort to support your understanding, and to show you that despite all of the concessions I will make and liberties I will take in writing and presenting this document to you, there is indeed an idea held by other people, accompanied by a set of their expectations, for what this document should be and do. The second choice I made pertains to exactly which dictionary’s definition I presented to you, and in this case I used a definition that best matched both my personal values and the point that I hope to make for you here. The final choice made was the selection of which portion of the dictionary definition I provided to you, as I did not provide for you every word of WordNet’s entry for dissertation. And now that you know the “truths” behind my selections and omissions, you might be feeling a bit awkward, and quite frankly, so do I.

In a nutshell, this is the nature of academic research, and believe it or not, the nature of literature and rhetoric as a whole. The entire process, from author’s mind to the reader’s eye, is

influenced by an individual's choices, an individual's choices are influenced by her agenda, and her agenda is subject to her own deeply established values and beliefs. While much of the academic establishment has attempted to work within a model of objectivity that is impersonal and scrubbed of character, charisma, and personality, or is possibly a fallacy altogether (Phillips & Burbules, 2000), each author is still making choices that directly affect each and every reader. The three choices I made surrounding the presentation of a simple dictionary definition represent the numerous similar decisions any author makes when he attempts to offer his own message in credible fashion through a combination of references to others' thoughts and constructions of his own ideas. Like it or not, readers are subject to whims and fancies of the authors they choose to read.

Readers, on the other hand, have one ultimate weapon in the often-silent exchange between author and reader: trust. The readers' trust allows the author's prose to fulfill the intended mission, and just the same, the readers' mistrust converts each of the author's words into weapons that wrap around and beat him down through his own energies. Because of our social nature, I like to believe that people trust other people, and that trust is not frivolously spent on inanimate objects. In the case of information consumption, especially with reports of academic research, readers must choose whether to trust the author, which requires that the readers trust nearly every small choice made by the author—choices similar to the ones I made about the definition of dissertation. However, readers of academic literature are often denied much of the information they could find useful for making the trust/distrust decision about each written work they explore. The author is perceived to be irrelevant, or an enigma, or worse yet, the author is perceived to be simply the sum of sentences and points made in the book or article or essay that captured the reader's attention. Trust is ultimate. It is a product of a relationship between two people. And in academic research, trust is often given short shrift.

To that point, a dissertation like this one is, by design, an individual's unique construction of a problem. In most cases it is a document that represents both the process and the product of a research endeavor pursued by the advanced doctoral student who hopes to complete the doctor of philosophy degree in his chosen field of study. In my case, I want to complete my doctoral degree in the Instructional Systems Program, and to this end I have conducted research in the "real world" that sprawls beyond the walls of the university. My audience also lives in the real world, whether they believe it or not, despite the presence or absence of academic titles, university roles, organization memberships, leadership positions, parenthood status, or even the slightest background knowledge related to anything that I present in this document. I am willing to attempt to communicate with all comers, to meet as many of their expectations as possible, simply because they share interests similar to mine, and from those shared interests it is possible that we could, together, offer an iota of improvement to the human condition. Yes, I want the vanity of becoming "Dr. Josh," but the motive for subjecting myself to nine years of graduate education was to prepare myself to help others. In other words, I want to "matter" in a way that is meaningful to other people, and I want my dissertation to reflect that desire.

It is obvious that something about this document has piqued your interest: whether it was the main idea of the research, the title, abstract, or byline, or even some idle chitchat you may have overheard about it. And because of how this document has been delivered to you, you have the right and opportunity to skip ahead to the information that you currently care about the most. When I complained about reading so many pages of history texts as a first-year college student, the late Dr. Robert McHale sternly replied, "Don't read the books, use the books." That advice was sage, and I am certainly not preventing such approaches here. However, I feel that it is my responsibility to provide for you the opportunity to better understand the person who is making all of the small choices that make up the entirety of the document before you. I believe that the research reported here is meaningful enough to be unabashedly shared and open to review,

because I believe it should be presented to and considered by real people working in the real world. But I also believe that the research reported here was conducted with a level of skill and quality that demonstrates the satisfactory completion of the university's requirements that stand between "Josh" the student and "Dr. Josh" the professional who has dedicated a large chunk of his young life in preparation for making a difference. As it should be, everyone else benefits from this product, and I only benefit when you achieve the results you seek.

Not only is this dissertation unique by requirement, it is unusual in style—my colleagues in the academy should take note. First, this prologue is in place to reveal to you much more information about my thought process, my motives, and me as an individual than is usually available in most dissertations. Second, I have implemented a writing style known as scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2004), which continues the self-disclosure. Scholarly personal narrative (SPN) allows me to present to you the story of my research, which makes my role and my personal perspectives available for your inspection. Any research endeavor is actually a story, regardless of how authors choose to report their findings, and each researcher-author makes a choice about whether she should have a "visible" role in the report. For some research methods in some scientific disciplines, the visibility of the researcher-author may not seem to make much of a difference in reporting of the research findings, such as research that focuses on things or material objects like highway overpasses, E. Coli bacteria, antiretroviral pharmaceuticals, or supernovas in other galaxies. While those investigations appear to be looking for answers that could be considered definite or precise with the use of numbers from direct measurements and inferences from statistical analyses, the researcher-author may still be coloring the presentation of the findings through the choices s/he makes regarding the content, style, language, and format of the investigation and subsequent report.

The structure and form of this dissertation will differ from typical doctoral dissertations. The "typical" dissertation written by many of my graduate school colleagues and advisors often

contained five chapters: (1) an introductory statement of the problem and preview of the remaining chapters, (2) a review of all theoretically and methodologically literature pertaining to the topic of the author's research, (3) an explanation of the methods utilized for the author's research study, (4) a discussion of the findings the author gained from implementing their research methods, and (5) a conclusion that summarizes the implications of those findings within the author's field of research (see, for example, pp. 51-57 of Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003 for a discussion of the five chapter/section model). While I make no claims as to whether one form is better than the other, I do claim that the scholarly personal narrative form of this document is a better match to both me as a researcher/writer and to the subject matter of the research, and this improved fit is why I chose to not compose a typical five-chapter dissertation. In my case, I feel more comfortable with writing narrative that allows me to be a first-person participant in the dialogue, as opposed to traditional objective scholarly discourse where the author's personal perspectives and beliefs are unavailable for reader consideration. To this point, scholarly personal narrative is considered "a work that actually enlarges the notion of 'serious scholarship' to include the most important voice in writing: the author's. In SPN, the writer is as much the message as the message itself" (Nash, 2004 p. 53).

In addition to SPN being a better fit for me as the author, the Venturing program context for the study is also well suited for SPN-based research for two reasons: the program's delivery is based entirely on the volunteers, and scholarly research literature about the program's implementation is nonexistent. My experience as a volunteer with the program provides important insight that would be unavailable if I was unable to include my personal experience and perspective due to an expectation of objectivity that is often present in scholarly literature. Furthermore, without other authors' Venturing program-specific research to build upon, strict researcher objectivity would induce a loss of context that could prevent readers from gaining a full appreciation of the complexity of Venturing's aims and mission and the weight of the

responsibilities that are placed upon the adult volunteers in the program. For a previously unexplored research topic, SPN offers a point of entry: my personal interpretations of my experience in the program can start a dialogue through the reporting of both my personal observations and research findings, allowing other researchers and I to subsequently build upon the understanding of youth programs like this one with future study.

With specific regard to the structure of the document, readers will find that my personal background justifies and forwards the research questions of this study. By design, two aspects of my personal experience bind this document together: my experience as a youth member of the Boy Scouts of America (see Chapter 2), and my experience in preparing for, conducting, and learning from this research study (Chapter 3 and beyond). Within Chapter 3 and throughout the document you will encounter a moderate number of citations to relevant research literature, and this quantity is moderate by design. In reference to citations of others' work in the composition of SPN, Nash (2004) wrote:

...Learn how to avoid using too many or too few of them. Alluding to too many proof texts means that you actually have very little to say on your own. Alluding to too few means that you have no background for what others have said about what you want to say on your own. The *apt proof text* provides a context, deepens your writing, extends its implications, grounds its insights, and, most of all, explicitly acknowledges the contributions of others to your thinking. No author is an island, ever. No author is above needing a little help from others every now and then (pp. 65-66).

Thus, the presentation I make in Chapter 3 presents the scholarly influences that have founded my concept for this research, but the intention of the SPN presented here is to focus upon my conceptualization of the Venturing program's benefits, limitations, and perceived opportunities that have come to me from both my personal experience and formal study. Simultaneously readers will be able to learn about the Venturing program, the training of adult volunteers, and about the process I have undergone to better understand my ability to improve each of those.

Research that involves people who have unique personalities and backgrounds, especially educational research like what I will present in this report, tends to not be definite or precise. In fact, my research implements what are known as *qualitative research methods* that support and utilize the differences among each individual recruited to participate in this study. My research is not collecting survey responses or taking measurements, my research is asking people for their stories related to a particular topic, and their collected stories, in turn, can be brought together by me and delivered to you. Ultimately, SPN works hand-in-hand with qualitative research because I am able to report my findings to you in the way that I came to understand them from the participants, as opposed to the more traditional academic writing styles that might require authors to shoehorn the study participants' thoughts into a presentation that may be "objective".

A particular reason for my effort to include myself in this report is that some of the elements of this research described in this document have not been combined together in previously published research. For example, I chose to combine three distinct lines of theory and research with an educational program and a specific role within that program to create what I will argue is a paradox, or a "perfect storm" that should be investigated further. After searching through contemporary education and psychology literature, I can say that the details of my personal research interests are unique. While I do not claim that the application of those theories to those types of settings or roles is wholly my own idea (as you will discover later), but the specific application of those theories to the organization highlighted in my study is one that I know to be necessary based on personal experience. If other people choose to follow-up with anything that I find in my research, then I think it is important for them and for their readers to have a full understanding of my background and an insight into the multitude of fundamental choices (described at the beginning) that I made while creating my report.

In the end, this document represents my own perspectives on a problem that is framed within the ongoing research by entire fields of specialized researchers. I simply offer my report of

what I learned when I both consulted the research literature by experts with a connection to the topic, and interviewed front-line ordinary people who personally experience the questions that I ask in the course of their daily lives. I believe such an approach will provide readers with a humanized account of the problem and some responses to the problem where the added richness and depth will be welcomed by the gamut from specialized researcher to concerned citizen. At the same time, the function of this document is just like any other research report and any other doctoral dissertation in that the questions have been framed within an ongoing discussion, and responses have been gathered using qualitative research methods representing a common toolkit and a well-revised guidebook. Of course my personal perspectives are visible throughout the document, as such visibility supports exactly the point I hope to make. Personal perspectives are woven into all forms of literature, whether fictive, research-based, or even a doctoral dissertation, but the difference here is that I choose to own my personal perspective and the role that I play throughout the course of the research, for better or for worse, and allow you the opportunity to be aware of, and even be a judge of, what I referenced, believed, did, and reported.

This prologue has offered you what I consider to be a proper introduction of the type and form of the report that you are reading right now, which is an offering that I hope will help you dive into such a read. As I sat in libraries, cafes, and my home office typing this, I imagined that the majority of the people who read these sentences will read them during their leisure time, possibly while searching for more information about working with young adults in non-school educational organizations—organizations that I imagined readers may already be volunteers within. Imagination aside, I welcome all readers, especially potential research and writing collaborators who seek to improve similar problems in similar organizations for similar outcomes.

Chapter 2

The Effects of My Childhood on My Research and Me

I believe that it is important for the readers of scholarly research reports to understand more about the authors of the documents they read. Since you are ultimately receiving only my personal interpretation (or my “filtration”, if you will) of others’ research, theory, and experiences related to the focus of this dissertation, you should learn about my background, which may help explain why I wrote what I wrote. While contemporary qualitative research articles and dissertations usually contain a researcher identity section, the degree to which the author’s identity is revealed may very well be constrained by editorial decisions or the author’s goal to more quickly tackle what they see as the “business” of the document. In this self-introduction I will do my best to avoid tedium, but I do hope to present a clear description of the connections that bind me to this particular research topic.

Early Years

I was born to a fruit, vegetable, and grain farming family located in the fertile plains region of upstate New York in a town called Albion, which is halfway between Rochester and Buffalo on the Erie Canal. Both sides of my family have Irish and European ancestry, but we identify ourselves as white Americans without emphasis on heritage. I followed my father and grandfather to work on the farm from the earliest months of my mobility, converted my sandbox into an apple orchard at age 4, and began driving real tractors and farm trucks at age 5. When the school bus dropped me off each afternoon I quickly changed my clothes and pursued my choice of (a) saddling my grandfather’s ill-tempered pony and riding on him as he wandered his

preferred path through the apple and pear orchards in my backyard (nearly dying once); (b) following the tractor sounds in nearby orchards and fields until I could climb into the cab and drive them on the lap of whatever relative or hired worker would stop to let me in (nearly dying once and nearly killing my grandfather at least twice); and (c) using every available farm tool, machine, and scrap material to construct functionally (but not aesthetically) elaborate tree houses, forts, go-karts, playground equipment replicas, animal pens, etc. According to my memories, living on the farm was a good life, and I am certain the experiences seeded some of the creativity and visualization skills that I still rely on today. The daily interaction with my father, grandfather, uncles, cousins, and hired workers surely socialized me to a world of physicality and manliness. At that time of my life, I knew no professions other than those agricultural.

One day during Christmas Vacation 1988, the tree was trimmed and the house quietly dusted with snow, but Mom did not return to what I knew as home. My family had arrived at a turning point. Abuses of alcohol and other drugs, and of other people, had created a situation that farm-boy ingenuity could not resolve. Mom had secretly and swiftly moved into her parents' house on the other side of town, having passed her tipping point with the relationship between her and my father. Weekend visitation rights were granted to my mother in the early stages of the divorce hearings, and the lives of my four-years-younger brother and me continued on the farm without our mother close by on the weeknights. Visits to Mom's new apartment exposed us to life as a kid living in the Village of Albion, and we enjoyed the ability to walk independently to our favorite stores, eliminating the need for a 20-minute car ride. Within a year of Mom's initial departure the tables had turned in the divorce proceedings and Mom was no longer seen as the one who left her kids behind but as a woman who fled for safety from a toxic marital situation without the initial financial means to properly support her children. By age 11 I was a "townie" who was also a weekend farm-boy, and relatives and friends noticed the differences in my interests and skills within months.

Despite the abrupt changes in my environment, family relations, and after-school activities, I was still a Cub Scout in Pack 837. Two years earlier the “Join Cub Scouts!” mimeograph on orange paper was placed in my second grade classroom’s milk carton mailbox. My mother took me to the sign-up day because, as she said, I “needed to learn how to get along with other kids” since my closest friends up to that time were employees of the farm and farm-family relatives. There was little hesitation when I arrived to my first den meeting; after all, I was absolutely certain that I was the leader of the den. Some may argue that after my years of involvement with BSA programs that I still walk into meetings *certain that I was the leader*, but I believe that the many lessons that I have learned in the Scouting and professional worlds provide me with some added qualifications to serve as the actual leader.

While Cub Scouting is intended to be a program that facilitates parent-child togetherness, the circumstances of my divorced family life made that rather impossible. Surely, one or both of my parents attended the special events like the annual Blue and Gold Banquet or the Thanksgiving-time Scouting for Food drive for canned goods, but the week-to-week and special weekend involvement regularly conflicted with Mom’s and Dad’s work schedules. Living in the Village enabled me to either walk to or get rides from others to most meetings and activities. I do not even remember asking others for rides, somehow they were always available at the right times, and I am still grateful for the investments made in me by so many parents of other kids and leaders.

Memories of my Cub Scouting experiences are generally hazy, but some important events stand out. First, Cub Scouting was the one thing in my life about which my mother and father could both agree to support. Even when Dad withheld child support payments or when Mom borrowed money from relatives to buy us birthday gifts, I always had the \$2.00 per month I needed to pay my “dues” fee to my Cub Scout den, I always had a spectacular uniform with myriad patches and pins, and I attended almost every single field trip, campout, and summer

camp from the time I joined. Second, Cub Scouting introduced me to an array of adult characters who were the leaders of my den and pack. These adults were almost always totally different from my own parents and relatives in that hardly any of them were divorced, they worked a variety of white-collar, pink collar, or technical blue-collar jobs, and the families I had the closest relationships with were grandparent-like or African American or biracial. They were all dedicated to their Cub Scouts' well being, and some of them treated me as if I was one of their children.

I developed the closest relationship with Barb, the Cubmaster of my pack, and it was obvious that she held me in special regard. Every time Barb met one of my parents or relatives, she always mentioned that she believed that I was destined for greatness in the world. When I was about 8 years old, Barb was dying of terminal cancer, and she asked to see me. I clearly remember my mother escorting me to the hospital, and that Mom's cautionary words about Barb not looking the same made no sense to me until I was at Barb's bedside. From underneath the tubing and blankets, Barb chitchatted like usual, and then she surprised me by asking me to continue to be a good Cub Scout and Boy Scout even though she would not be at the meetings anymore. Barb was the first person I grieved for, and hers was the first funeral I attended. She did her best (the Cub Scout motto) to help me be prepared (the Boy Scout motto) for the real world, even in her final days.

At the Klondike Derby (a winter camping event) on January 20, 1990, something spectacular happened to me. I was a Webelos Scout (the last stage of Cub Scouting), and my den joined our affiliated Boy Scout troop on the campout. After we finished dinner cleanup, Scoutmaster Duane (who was Barb's widower) told some of the oldest Boy Scouts to take us Webelos Scouts on an evening nature hike through the woods. It was a mild winter evening in the woods in Western New York State, and I remember thinking to myself during the hike that I would be upset if Duane told us to go to bed early that night.

When we returned from the hike, the campsite had been transformed. A large campfire was built, and at least a dozen Tiki torches that I had never seen before were posted in a wide circle around the fire ring. The Boy Scouts were lined up straight, and our guides lined us Webelos Scouts up parallel to and facing the Boy Scouts with the campfire in between the two lines. The Senior Patrol Leader (the top youth leader of a Boy Scout troop) asked each of us if we wanted to join their Boy Scout troop, we all said yes, and then Duane taught us how to make the Boy Scout sign with our hands and arms, ultimately having us repeat the Boy Scout Oath one line at a time. I was now a Boy Scout. This was a monumental event in my young life. The added effort and detail that made it a *ceremony* set a precedent that I have attempted to give to others in many special Scouting moments since that time.

Looking back on my junior high and high school years, my life as a Boy Scout became my identity. My public and private personae converged when I was viewed from a perspective of being a Scout. Scouting met all of my needs during my teenage years: it was an unusual, active, fun, purposeful, well-defined, well-received, and well-rewarded escape that seemed to always demand just the right amount of energy from me at just the right time to ensure that I avoided much of the mischief that was surely available to me. Scouting seemed to feed my achievement as a student, and my academics seemed to feed my achievement as a Scout.

The Boy Scout era of my life is divided into two periods: “before Eagle Scout” and “after Eagle Scout”. I passed my Eagle Scout board of review on January 17, 1994, shortly after my 15th birthday. Up until that board of review date, most of my waking moments were focused on earning Boy Scouting recognition by completing requirements for badges, pins, ranks, and roles within my troop. I was able to learn new skills and memorize information very quickly, and I had few fears about socializing with new people and speaking in front of groups, all of which attributed to my success in both American public schools and the Boy Scouts of America. Receiving high marks on difficult exams did not seem half as rewarding as having another merit

badge presented to me in front of an assembled group of parents and Scouts. After receiving my Eagle Scout Award, my Boy Scout life focused on leadership, training, event planning and implementation, and ultimately just showing off. I still revel in the fact that my friends from other Boy Scout troops in other towns (and even other counties, which was a big deal to my family at the time) would invite me to attend their troop's backpacking and canoeing trips just so that I could teach them outdoor skills that I knew by heart. As you will read later, my interests in education grew from these experiences.

Throughout my Boy Scout era, during school months (September through June) I spent at least one weekend away from home each month at an outdoor or camp setting—as I grew older, the number of weekends also grew to two, three, or sometimes even four weekends a month in the early spring and fall. Then came the summer camp staff stage of my life, where I lived at Camp Dittmer, located two hours (85 driving miles) away from my hometown, for six to nine weeks each summer. When Scouts and leaders in my troop promoted camping participation with a gimmick of wearing strands of colored hobby beads off of their belts to signify the number of outdoor overnights each had personally achieved, my strands of beads stretched down past my knees, and adolescent self-consciousness subtly forced me to “forget” to wear that ever again. By the time I hit my 17th birthday, I had lived the equivalent of 15 months outdoors over the previous six years.

People and Purposes During Adolescence

Just like my Cub Scout experience, the relationships I had with the nonparent adults of my Boy Scout life were important and well remembered. I was never abandoned or estranged by either my Mom or Dad, but their lives were what I would now describe as “tumultuous” for a teenager. My mother assumed the full-time single parent role for my brother and I, which brought

about financial hardship along with all other challenges of raising two boys. After a few years she resumed dating and when I was 13 she married her second husband, a man with whom I had a very tense and argumentative relationship. I went to a Boy Scout fishing derby the weekend of their wedding. My father remarried much sooner after the initial divorce, to a woman who was over 10 years younger than him and who had three daughters, and that scenario was destabilizing and particularly foreign to me. I will not say that Scouting events were an “excuse,” but to my Dad and stepmother they were an acceptable reason to miss all or most of a visitation weekend at their home.

My relationship with Duane, the Scoutmaster of my troop, was not necessarily a friendship as much as it was a long-term mentor-protégé interaction. It was Duane’s selflessness that allowed me to escape from the craziness that was my home life, and although subtle in his actions, he would not allow the escape time to be total avoidance of the issues. For example, Duane, Duane’s new wife Carol (after Barb passed away), and I were cruising down the New York State Thruway in Duane’s Chevy pickup truck that was packed with the troop’s camping and fishing gear on the Friday when my mother was marrying her second husband. We were about 90 minutes from home when Carol nonchalantly asked me what my Mom was doing that weekend. In a disgusted tone, I replied with great animation, “She’s getting married to [name]!” Up until that point, I had never known how strongly seatbelts could restrain a 150-pound boy until I felt the speed of the truck drop from 75 to zero on the Thruway shoulder. “She’s what?!?” Duane asked. We sat still on the road for what I remember to be a long time, while I pled my case that I indeed did not need to attend the wedding ceremony, and I explicated with great detail the reasons why I did not support the union. Duane resumed the trip to camp only when we reached a logical impasse: While turning red, I angrily declared that if they took me back home, that I would run away into the woods, and I would not be found. Duane knew that for about 9 weeks over the past two summers I taught the entire Wilderness Survival Merit Badge to dozens of

summer campers and my own troop's Scouts, and had read dozens of books on the topic.

Therefore, I was fully capable of carrying out my threat. I know now that they knew back then that forcing a confrontation with someone who they were intentionally developing to become "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight" (Boy Scout Oath) may possibly become more harmful than productive. By the way, I won the fishing derby, and returned to my new household with a golden jumping fish trophy and a big box of fishing gear and other outdoor loot.

Duane and many other adult Scouters treated me as a very important person. I do not know whether they perceived their actions that way, but I did at the time, and I can see that they valued me highly. Duane picked me up at my house for almost every Boy Scout meeting and event that I did not walk to, and he dropped me off wherever I needed to go (Dad's, Mom's, Grandparents', etc.). He and the other adults did their best to allow the "boys to be in charge" as they always put it. Even though we Scouts might have also benefitted from slightly more active mentorship and advisement (skills that will be discussed in this document), I must credit them with showing great restraint from bossing around their Scouts like Marine recruits at boot camp which is a practice that I currently witness in some Scout troops across the country.

As a youth, my role as the top Scout in the troop allowed for me to have a booming voice, literally and metaphorically, in whatever decisions the Scouts actually made in our troop. I am certain that all of the Scouting experiences of my adolescence had a positive impact on the type of person I became as a young adult in the real world beyond the Scouting community. Without a doubt, the credit for the positive impact belonged to all of the people who enabled my Scouting experiences at such a critical time when so many other aspects of my life were unstable. Since practically every youth development organization seeks to support their youth members in developing and transferring a set of skills and values that contribute in a positive manner to their real-world communities, I believe that my Scouting-based upbringing achieved its goals.

Fond Memories, Yet Suboptimal Youth Development

The truth must be told, however, that despite my fondness of those memories, when I use my present day education and expertise to look back at my Scouting experience as a youth, I can see that Duane and the other adults I knew approached their mentorship of youth in Scouting settings in ways that were less than ideal. For starters, when I look back at the adults I knew in Scouting, I believe they ultimately squandered numerous opportunities to facilitate the personal development of myself and other young people. The biggest example of a squandered opportunity was that these adult volunteers did little to recognize the differences in the skills and abilities of the individual youth in the troop. They were not focused on supporting the development of each boy so that he could become a contributor to society, rather their aims were to produce good Boy Scouts—young men who were proficient at the skills necessary to earn ranks and merit badges. While they spoke of the benefits of knowing those Scouting skills in terms of college admissions benefits and career potential, they rarely connected the lessons they taught to us with real-world applications that were meaningful in the short term. These gentlemen helped me set a goal of becoming an Eagle Scout, and I developed interests in attaining that rank that were strong enough to guide me to that achievement. However, none of my fellow Boy Scouts in my troop earned the Boy Scout program's highest achievement, and I cannot keep myself from wondering whether and how the lives of those other people would be different if our troop's adult volunteers had actively coached them toward Eagle Scout Award attainment. More-or-less by chance I was a young person who had the personal drive to work from ages 11 to 15 to complete the requirements necessary for that award; my fellow Scouts, on the other hand, may have required more support and encouragement than what they received, and without that support and encouragement their attention turned away from the Boy Scout program as we all grew older.

Using the same example—where I became an Eagle Scout and other Scouts in the troop did not—there are a number of methods I now know that could have been approached differently by the Scoutmaster and other adult volunteers with the troop. First, the adult volunteers could have helped the other Boy Scouts develop a greater sense of ownership in the troop. They allowed me to take the initiative to lead and organize the troop, which was good for me, but deprived the other Scouts of their own opportunities to have a say. And with the decisions my fellows and I did make, they were not visionary decisions, but rather they were fill-in-the-detail decisions. For example, my fellows and I did not really make decisions about where we wanted to go or what activity we wanted to do, but rather we received word that we were going fishing at Camp Dittmer on the second weekend of June and that we needed to decide what we wanted the menu to be. In addition to developing a sense of ownership of the troop within each of the Scouts, the adult volunteers could have also helped my fellows and I learn that the person who speaks first, or speaks the loudest, is not always the person who possesses the best or the only ideas. If my Scoutmaster or other adult volunteer with the troop would have taught me that lesson, and others would have witnessed me learning that lesson (along with having the chance to learn that lesson on their own), I believe we all would have gained an important perspective on leadership, teamwork, and communication that would have been immediately applicable to our lives in school and at home. While we can never know for sure the reasons why my troop's adult volunteers did not pursue these opportunities for the personal growth of their Boy Scouts, I have one working hypothesis: they did not know that these lessons would be important for the youth they worked with, nor did they know how they could have facilitated such aspects for personal growth in those youth.

The academic research context that I work within now, however, offers methods for harnessing these comparisons for the betterment of the future, at least for the future of anyone who is affected by a person who heeds a simple lesson or two that can come from the research. If

you have not yet been able to sense my intentions for this document and this research project, here is a key point that will help you move forward: Scouting had a positively profound impact on my adolescent development, and my appreciation for the tireless efforts of the adults who devoted so much of themselves to my positive development has driven me to devote my academic studies to understanding how adults can be prepared to provide an even more effective learning experience to adolescents outside of their formal school environments. The intertwining of my experiences as a Cub Scout and Boy Scout in my youth, as a leader in the programs of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) in my adulthood, and as a young educational researcher in my vocation have helped me make sense of the real needs that adult volunteers have for supporting the positive development of adolescents in their local communities.

Scouting and Adulthood

I am still involved in the BSA because doing so simply feels “right” for me. I have been an active member for over two decades, from the time I earned my Bobcat award as a Cub Scout to now my current role as a volunteer on a national committee. I have maintained my involvement as an adult because of the benefits provided to the community by the Scouting program. I have believed since my time as an undergraduate studying public communication that involvement in the BSA was my proving grounds, in that if I failed to utilize my higher education to effect positive change in an all-volunteer youth-serving organization, then the contents of my higher education should be reevaluated. While those reevaluations have certainly taken place, much to my benefit, I have found that the BSA as a teaching and learning culture is a fruitful test-bed for academically informed strategies and tactics in communication, education, and I surmise many other fields.

The worlds between Boy Scout and Boy Scout Leader are quite distinct. The types of fun and methods for enjoying the program are not the same for youth and adults, which was a transition that I needed to grow into. As a Boy Scout, I was highly motivated to earn awards and serving in increasingly higher leadership roles. When adult volunteers in the BSA make the pursuit of awards and status the entire purpose of their involvement, they become frustrated with the small amount of recognition that is available for adults in this youth-serving organization. Furthermore, it is likely that their peers could find their quest for glory to be obnoxious. One of the biggest advantages I have discovered about serving as an adult leader in the BSA's programs is the ability to stand to the side and observe the hustle-and-bustle of the Scouts participating in the best activities. While reflection and observation are encouraged in numerous ways for the more senior youth in Boy Scout activities and especially in leadership training, rarely would an adult leader choose to still any aged youth and remove him from the fun. And while the adult leaders are encouraged to participate in activities with the youth in their charge (which often include their own children), the opportunities to participate come far less often than their opportunities to observe, absorb, and when needed, regulate the entire scenario, when the Scouts are admittedly at their best and their worst.

As an adult leader in the Boy Scout program, I have served in a few different roles in which I worked directly with the youth, but the role that had the most influence on me personally, and unexpectedly on my educational research interests, was that of Unit Commissioner. This is a role within the BSA's local support infrastructure that is designed specifically to observe, consult, communicate, and take action all with regard to the "health" of the program and activities within troops, packs, and crews (known collectively as "units") in each local area. They serve as the conduits of information to and from the local unit leaders and the district staffs who provide specialized support for Scouting on a wider geographic area (often delineated by school district, county, or township boundaries). In this role I was able to observe and participate in hundreds of

meetings and events for myriad units in a variety of settings. I also enjoyed being the trainer of scores of adult leaders. I think that I learned more from them than they did from me, given the deep and probing questions that I could not stop myself from asking before, during, and after the trainings.

All of this time observing, talking, and reflecting on the Boy Scout programs and on youth development in general coincided with the completion of my bachelor's degree in communication, and the early stages of my graduate school studies in instructional systems design. When I first entered the instructional systems doctoral program (INSYS), without much thought I believed that my professional interests revolved around improving traditional public school K-12 education. However, a variety of pressures and questions began to nag at my perceived professional identity. First, it was obvious that my K-12 education was not the setting where I learned the lessons that I valued the most from my youth. Without a doubt, those lessons came from my time as a Boy Scout. Second, it had become obvious that the Scouting setting as an educational context contained numerous benefits and flaws when it was viewed through the lens of educational theory and research. The problem was that I knew I could not expect every volunteer leader in the BSA to pursue graduate degrees in education fields in order to help them help their Scouts learn how to pitch tents, tie knots, or describe what citizenship means to them. Lastly, the study of instructional systems was supposed to be systemic in its view of learning and instruction, but the role of the community, and the innumerable other contexts that influence what people "learn" and "know", was not at the time included in my graduate program's study of systems of learning and instruction.

The observation I made as an adult leader also provided me with a chance to better understand some of my own youthful experiences as a Scout, and I paid special attention to the older youth. For the majority of Boy Scouts past and present, including me, pursuing and earning the Eagle Scout Award is the ultimate challenge. I was able to complete this ultimate challenge

just as I turned 15-years-old, and many Eagle Scouts complete the award before they turn 14, even though Boy Scout eligibility runs for approximately seven years, from age 11 to the Scout's 18th birthday. I was able to occupy myself in the BSA in my post-Eagle-Scout-Award era by finding ways to teach, lead, and organize other Scouts, and I believe that it was this additional practice time that refined my social skills in ways that made me successful as a college student. But what about the other teens, regardless of their Eagle Scout Award status, whose attention shifts as they mature, and when they are drawn away from the traditions and structure of the Boy Scout program?

In August 1998, the BSA launched Venturing, a coed, adventure and personal development-focused program for young women and men age 14 years old through 20 years old. While BSA had previously established a coed program for older teens called Exploring, that program focuses on the development of professional and career skills, and it is often located at offices, worksites, and schools. Venturing, on the other hand, promises young adults much less real-world seriousness, and provides them with a safe environment to pursue their interests. They can be themselves outdoors or indoors, with a group of like-minded and similarly aged young adults. They are guided by a few adult advisors (over age 21). Advisors and youth work together as leaders and followers like any civic organization, and make personal decisions to pursue awards or not. Not only are awards and advancements optional in Venturing, but so is the uniform. While a traditional Boy Scout style uniform is available (with all the meaningful patches and pins, etc.), and some type of group-identification is recommended, a uniform is ultimately optional and at the discretion of the Venturers. If the Boy Scout program's structure did anything to repel young men, then the Venturing program's less defined and flexible methods for organization attract them and young women as well. In August 2005 I volunteered to become the chairman of the Venturing program in my local district. In early 2007, due to a string of

coincidences, I was invited to become a member of the volunteer national committee that oversees and sets the direction for Venturing across all of its membership.

The Venturing program, in its “textbook” form, offers young adults the most latitude in personal decision-making and overall autonomy out of the traditional BSA programs¹. From my experience, I consider the Cub Scout program for boys age six to eleven to be adult driven. That is, the Cub Scouts are able to provide some limited input while their parents and adult leaders make the final program decisions. An example of this could be a decision for a carpentry activity, where the boys get to decide whether they make a birdhouse, a bookshelf, or a box from wood, nails, and glue at their upcoming den meeting. Boy Scouts (age 11 to 18) have a youth leadership structure where the Scouts make decisions for themselves and for their group within scaffolding that has been established by the adults. On the group level, patrol leaders (i.e. leaders of sub-divisions of a Boy Scout troop that usually consist of 6-8 boys) may poll their fellow patrol members regarding the desired destination for their 5-mile hike that they are required to do for the First Class Rank. Then the patrol leaders pass the patrol’s decision to the adult assistant Scoutmasters who accompany them on the hike. Individual Scouts can make many decisions regarding the merit badges they want to earn. If the Scout pursues the Eagle Scout Award, then he must earn at least twenty-one merit badges, with twelve badges being compulsory (like First Aid, Personal Management, Family Life, Camping, and other “basic skills”) and ten elective badges at the discretion of the Scout (Boy Scouts of America, 2010a). With over 120 merit badges to choose from, Scouts can certainly find the topics and skills that interest them. Boy Scouts on the “trail to Eagle” are also required to complete various leadership and community service projects, as well as hold various leadership roles within their troop. Since each Scout’s trail to the Eagle Scout Award is the backbone of the entire Boy Scout program, the boys have many opportunities to exercise individual choices within a predictable range established by the rank, advancement, and award requirements they are supposed to pursue.

Venturers, on the other hand, who are involved with a local Venturing crew that adheres to the tenets of the Venturing program, have relatively few scaffolds in place in terms of ranks and awards, and all of those scaffolds are ultimately optional. The organization that charters (sponsors) a Venturing crew can choose to provide some direction to the general theme of the activities pursued by its crew members. For example, a local watershed conservation organization may charter a Venturing crew in order to involve young adults in local environmental conservation efforts. Beyond such macro-level theme selection, the Venturers assume the majority of the remaining choices that identify them as a group and as individuals. Therefore, the influence of the chartering organization that serves as the administrative “home” for any given Venturing crew is typically quite small. Even though that chartering organization retains a significant amount of authority regarding the crew’s operations (i.e. adult volunteer approval and appointment, general theme of the crew, ownership of crew property, etc.), this authority is often invisible to the Venturers.

Like the Boy Scouts, Venturers have a number of awards available to them, but Venturing program awards are slightly more difficult than Boy Scout program awards. Venturing does have a “highest award”, the Silver Award, which could be seen as the age-appropriate equivalent to the Eagle Scout Award. The first choice an individual Venturer has is whether to pursue the Silver Award at all. The Venturing program is designed for the crew and its Venturers to pursue personal challenges and adventure in the world, whether or not that adventure takes place in the outdoors. That means that a Venturer could completely ignore the Silver Award and all other formal leadership and skill awards (which exist in the areas of the outdoors, seamanship, religious life, sports and fitness, firearms shooting, etc.), and still have a fun, busy, healthy, safe, productive, educational, and challenging, experience in the Venturing program, all the while adhering to the program’s overall mission and vision.

In my ongoing adult leader experience in the BSA, many opportunities arise where careful and detailed comparisons of the methods used by the Cub Scout, Boy Scout, and Venturing programs come in handy. With only twelve years under its belt, compared to the Boy Scout program's 100 years, many zealous Boy Scout leaders still can not (or will not) comprehend the value of the lack of structure and uniform expectations imposed upon all Venturers nationwide. I have also met, worked with, and become friends with many adult leaders who discover Venturing and immediately feel a sense of relief for both themselves and the teenage men and women who do not want, or completely rebel against, the structure of the Boy Scouts, or, in the added case of the young women, who could not have joined the Boy Scout program even if they had desired. The adult volunteers of the BSA are the people who are primarily responsible for delivering the program as the organization intended. It is also those same volunteers who could ignore the programs' design and methods. Given that the values and methods for each of the programs vary so greatly, volunteers need to be trained by their local BSA infrastructure (their district or council) when they choose to serve in an adult leadership role in a new program. This means that the majority of the factors that influence the quality of a Venturer's experience with Venturing depend directly on his or her crew's adult advisor and the expectations set forth by the crew advisor. The remainder of this report explores the importance of the crew advisor to the success of her/his Venturing crew.

The BSA Viewed Through the Researcher-Volunteer Lens

I went to college after high school because I believed that college study was the next stop on path to success in life in general, and because I wanted to become successful then I needed to go to college. I probably developed these beliefs about college and success from the encouragement I received all throughout high school, where I was a strong student and those

strengths were recognized and encouraged by my teachers and my family. And while I was also involved in athletics, musical theatre, a cappella choir, S.A.D.D. (Students Against Doing Drugs), and an exchange study for a year in Japan, throughout my youth I most consistently excelled at scholastics and Scouting. It is not much of a surprise to me that I went to college, and continued into graduate school, and then I conducted a research study about a Scouting topic to get myself out of graduate school. It may also not be a surprise to the readers that I am one of just a few people in my nuclear and extended family who graduated from college, let alone graduate school, and I will be the first person in the traceable history of both my mother's and father's ancestry to earn a doctorate. Being a student, and now being a researcher, seems like a part of my identity, just like being a Scout was a part of my identity as a youth. The convergence of research and Scouting in my present life brings me peace, which is probably a subconscious reason behind why I pursued this research in the first place. For at least the past few years, I have looked at BSA programs through the lens of an educational researcher and a BSA volunteer.

I have come to understand that researchers like to investigate paradoxes. Paradoxes often involve contradictions, and contradictions are easy to attack, difficult to defend, and there is a sense of righting the world during the pursuit of rectifying a contradiction. Through my experiences as both a youth participant and an adult leader in BSA programs, I have had many opportunities to observe the outcomes and aftermath of the paradoxes that the BSA created within its organization. In the upcoming chapters you will read about what I believe to be one of the more large and onerous of the paradoxes of the BSA—the training of adult volunteers—which was the subject of the study reported here. The BSA's training of adult volunteers is based upon a principle that drives the BSA's program offerings: age-appropriateness. The BSA has learned that one youth program does not fit all youth, nor does one method of implementing a youth program meet the needs and interests of all youth.

An example of how one size does *not* fit all comes from the lessons learned that were the impetus for creating and launching the Venturing program. Since 1910, the BSA has known that the structure and expectations of the Boy Scout program are well-suited for encouraging young boys to broaden their knowledge base of skills and strengthen their characters in preparation for adulthood, and more specifically, their lives throughout junior high and high school. But like many other adult volunteers, I have watched how older boys, whether or not they have achieved the program's goal for them to become Eagle Scouts, have grown tired of fulfilling the checklists of requirements and expectations that they did not generate for themselves. The boys I have observed in the past have often dropped out of their Boy Scout troop's regular activities, abruptly reemerging at the times when the troop attends some spectacular activity or adventure. In an attempt to address this trend, the BSA launched the Venturing program, which revolves almost completely around fun activities and adventures planned and implemented for and by older youth. In creating this program, the BSA and its adult volunteers specifically lost the ability to structure, routinize, and predict the skills and personal growth that a Venturer would achieve—which differs greatly from the Boy Scout program's "do X get Y" predictability. Just like the Boy Scout program, at the heart of the Venturing program are adult volunteers. But unlike the adult volunteers involved with the Boy Scout program, adult volunteers in the Venturing program require completely different mental and material toolkits to properly achieve the aims, mission, and methods for the Venturing program. Herein lies the kicker of the paradox I mentioned earlier: Boy Scout and Venturing adult leaders are trained with the same training methods, using similar training content, despite the vastly differing program methods and job descriptions.

Given that I am a volunteer member of a national committee at one of the highest levels of administration in this national organization, mostly anyone would think that I would have the ability to resolve the paradox of adult volunteer training by identifying it to my peers in the BSA and suggesting revisions to the Venturing advisor training curriculum. Anyone who would think

that would be unaware of the traditional conservativeness of the BSA as whole, and how that conservatism warrants deliberation with regard to any changes made to that program. Serving as a national committee member may sound lofty, and it does have an important and meaningful purpose in my ongoing service to the BSA, but anyone holding a role on the BSA's national committee works within a quite limited scope, and I am not in position to influence the BSA's training curriculum. I have learned very quickly through my service among the national level of the BSA that influence at this level has less to do with the title, and more to do with the people I know and the willingness of the people I know to consider the argument I present. Therefore, I need data to back my claim that a change in the Venturing advisor training is indeed warranted. The data of greatest utility for composing persuasive recommendations about the redevelopment of the training that Venturing advisors receive would be the perceptions of crew advisors themselves, as their first-hand experience would describe how the program is actually being implemented, and not just how it was designed.

One personal characteristic that supports my ability to gather information that would strengthen my argument for changes within the BSA is my educational and professional background. My graduate education resides in the field of instructional systems—a field dedicated to the scholarly analysis of the interconnections among the components that make possible the process of teaching and learning in humans. The study of instructional systems can inform the Venturing program and the BSA because the program and the organization have an educational mission and vision, and they employ instructional methods, although they are not school programs. Just as learning is not confined to formal classrooms, instructional systems are not confined to schools. The Venturing program of the BSA represents an instructional system to which I have extensive experience and access, and it is through my personal connections to the program and the organization's people that rich data can be gathered. Therefore, for the purposes

of this research study and completing the requirements for my doctoral degree, Venturing is an instructional system that serves as a context for analysis.

I believe that the training of Venturing advisors creates a paradox that demands exploration in detail, and thus represents the motivation behind my research project and this document. Explaining my self-perceived, and self-promoted “necessity” for this research will require us to delve into a few theoretical subject areas that I have found to be extremely useful for understanding my interests in educational program design and implementation for adolescents outside of school settings—settings like the Venturing program that serves 14-through-20 year-old young adults. I would also hazard to guess that these theories would be useful to others who work in these and other similar settings. The three subjects that frame the problem that I have studied include (a) positive youth development, (b) nonformal learning, and (3) instructional systems design. As you will soon read, my personal observations are parallel with the recommendations made in scholarly literature, in that the BSA is a nonformal learning organization with a positive youth development vision and a flawed instructional systems design. Specifically, the BSA’s instruction (training) to the crew advisors charged with facilitating the positive development of its youth members does not teach the advisors the knowledge and skills necessary to support the realization of its positive development goals. In other words, the advisors are functioning under an illusion of preparedness, as defined by the knowledge and skills that support an administrative outcome for the benefit of the organization, yet they are given very little that would help them intentionally support the positive development of the youth in their crews.

¹ The BSA considers Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting, and Venturing to be “traditional” membership programs, as opposed to the Learning for Life program that has school students as members with school districts paying the membership fees, along with the Exploring program that has a career skills development focus. See <http://www.learningforlife.org>.

Chapter 3

A Contemporary Problem for Adult Volunteers in Youth Organizations

The adult volunteers who serve in the Boy Scouts of America shoulder the majority of the burden for fulfilling the mission and vision of the organization, and this is particularly the case for crew advisors in the BSA's Venturing program. The primary reason for having a volunteer organization is that compensated employees cannot accomplish the majority of the tasks of the organization because the funding for such compensation is nonexistent and they could not be paid to do the work, nor would they have the time and resources to have as broad of an impact as a widespread network of volunteers. This would especially be the case for large scale volunteer organizations where volunteers outnumber compensated professionals on the order of hundreds to one. So why is there a problem with the BSA's preparation of their adult volunteers, particularly their Venturing crew advisors? Am I just griping? And on what grounds is there a basis for actually conducting a research study to explore this "problem" and its potential solutions?

Adult Volunteers in the Venturing Program

Adult volunteers are arguably the backbone of many youth-focused programs, and that is certainly the case with the Boy Scouts of America. The volunteers bring the enthusiasm to the organization, coupled with the dedication to alter their schedules and their lives to make way for activities and events that are attended mostly by other people's children. Each program within the BSA serves a different age group, and the Venturing program's coed 14-through-20-year-old audience calls for a particular type of adult leader. Venturing crew advisors are the primary adult

volunteers who must relate well with each of the Venturers in their crew, regardless of the gender or age of the youth. The BSA describes the centrality of the crew advisor in the crew's operations, and ultimately its existence, in *The Venturing Leader Manual* (1998a):

The ultimate responsibility for the crew rests with the Advisor. ...As the primary adult leader, the Advisor sets the tone for the crew, models the desired form of leadership, and helps the officers and members become the leaders of their own crew. The Advisor coaches and guides, demonstrating through actions with the officers and members what the youth officers need to learn and similarly demonstrate with one another and with the members of their crew (p. 22).

Crew advisors receive their responsibility to the youth through their appointment to the role. Each Venturing crew (along with other BSA units, such as Cub Scout Packs, Boy Scout Troops, etc.) is not actually “owned” by the BSA, but is chartered to a local community organization. The chartering organization is typically a nonprofit entity like a faith-based institution or a community-serving fraternal organization. With this charter, the community organization assumes responsibility for selecting and approving the adult volunteers who work with the youth, and the BSA agrees to provide the training and the program resources for the adult volunteers to provide to the youth members. The chartering organization (sometimes known as “chartered partners” in BSA parlance) may then choose their adult volunteers according to their own principles. For example, any chartering organization could “hand-pick” the adult volunteers from that organization's own membership rolls and decline membership to anyone who is willing to volunteer but not a member of that organization. While this highly targeted form of adult volunteer appointment is possible, it is rarely enforced to such a strict degree as most chartering organizations see their BSA units as a means of reaching out to the community and educating others about the purposes of their mission. In the particular case of Venturing crew advisors there is usually a relationship with the chartering organization, and the amount of direction and influence had by the chartering organization upon the crew advisor and the crew's program itself will vary from crew to crew.

The BSA sets the more technical standards regarding adult volunteer qualifications. Venturing crew advisors must be at least 21-years-old, submit criminal and background checks, and provide character references. The BSA also requires that crew advisors and other primary adult leaders of units complete a variety of training requirements that will be discussed in detail in this report. The parents of the Venturers also have a say in the appointment of a crew advisor through the chairperson of the crew committee. The crew committee is usually comprised of parents and other adults who provide behind-the-scenes support for the crew like fundraising, activity logistics and transportation, and other forms of support. The chairperson of the committee must approve the registration and appointment of each adult volunteer. As the primary adult of a Venturing crew, a crew advisor needs to have a productive working relationship with a substantial number of people.

Crew advisors are the stewards of the Venturing program. They are the ones who ensure that Venturers experience the program according to the BSA's design and intent. Cubmasters and Scoutmasters may have the opportunity to plan and dictate the program to the youth, but crew advisors are expected to help the Venturers themselves understand and work with the BSA's design and intent for Venturing. The *Venturing Leader Manual* (1998a) reads:

The Advisor is the key adult leader and is responsible for training crew officers, helping them plan a program of activities, coaching them in their leadership responsibilities, and obtaining adult help and resources as needed through the crew committee (p. 21-22).

The explicit guidance for crew advisors about the Venturing program comes from the *Methods of Venturing* (Boy Scouts of America, 2010c). The BSA has designated the methods to be the primary means by which the needs of young adults are met, and how everyone involved with Venturing should deliver its program. Appendix D provides the full text of the methods of Venturing, along with other highly representative texts that guide the BSA and the Venturing program. I have summarized the methods of Venturing as follows:

- ❑ **Leadership** – The Venturers, not the adults, lead the crew, and all Venturers are given opportunities to learn and apply proven leadership skills through their experience with their crew.
- ❑ **Group Activities** – The Venturers of the crew should work together to learn new things by being active, so that success with anything that they do requires the interdependence of all members of the crew.
- ❑ **Adult Association** – As the youth officers lead the crew, adults provide support in a “shadow” leader capacity.
- ❑ **Recognition** – Peers and adults acknowledge each individual youth’s competence and ability, whether or not the youth choose to earn BSA awards.
- ❑ **The Ideals** – Venturers are asked to live by the Venturing Oath and Code (see Appendix D), fulfill their religious duties, and attend to the civic duties of citizens of this country.
- ❑ **High Adventure** – Venturers should engage in new and meaningful experiences that call for the practical application of their leadership abilities and build a sense of teamwork and camaraderie with the members of their crew.
- ❑ **Teaching Others** – Venturers teaching new information and skills to their peers leads to greater retention of that information in themselves, and helps them gain confidence in speaking to and relating with others.

The methods of Venturing cover a wide swath of personal development for youth, and it is this breadth where challenges arise for adult volunteers. Out of all of the criteria that advisors must satisfy in order to be appointed to the primary adult volunteer role in a crew knowledge and experience with facilitating youth development is not a consideration for the role. In fact, such knowledge and experience is not a consideration for any role, volunteer or professional, in the BSA. This surprises and concerns me because the organization could be seen from the outside as focusing on youth development. For example the “aims of the Boy Scouts of America are to build

character, develop citizenship, and foster personal fitness” (Boy Scouts of America, 2010c) and the mission of the organization “is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law” (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b).² Even a brief read of the aims and the mission of the organization shows that there is an expectation for the programs of the organization to actively engage in shaping young people’s attitudes and values. Since the adult volunteers are the stewards of each of the program’s intents through program delivery the shaping that is to be an inherent part of the experience with the program is squarely their responsibility.

Training Adult Volunteers to Become Venturing Crew Advisors

The people who become crew advisors, like all other adult volunteers in the BSA, are often, but not always, parents of youth who are members of the unit. Their tie to the program comes from the prospects they feel that the program has for the growth and development of their children, or for youth in general, and not necessarily because they believe they possess some existing qualification or skill that would make them suitable for roles within the program. And while the Cub Scout and Boy Scout programs rely on the supervision and program delivery provided by numerous adult volunteers, the youth leadership emphasis of the Venturing program and the inherent belief that adolescents can be self-sufficient to a degree greater than younger children substantially reduces the number of adults who need to be involved in the foreground “play-by-play” operations of the crew.

Although the number of adult volunteers needed for a successful Venturing crew decreases, the specialization of the skills of those involved adults increases. Let us consider three brief and simple examples of typical weekend camping trips from the Cub Scout, Boy Scout, and Venturing programs. Cub Scout camping is considered “family camping” (unless the oldest Cub

Scouts, known as Webelos Scouts, go camping with a Boy Scout troop), meaning that the Cub Scout pack may organize the event, but the boys must attend with at least one parent. The adults involved with the pack select, organize, implement, and supervise the activities and the boys. A Boy Scout troop's adult leaders, led by the Scoutmaster and the Assistant Scoutmasters, often lay out the framework for a weekend camping trip, and then ask the Boy Scouts to take responsibility for specific components of the weekend's activities. Based on the boys' choices and preferences, the adults will then oversee or perhaps direct the activity for the boys, but instructions will be relayed through the youth leaders of the troop, and the adults will not involve themselves with the minute-by-minute progress through the activities. A Venturing crew's campout represents a dramatic shift in adult leadership style from the other programs. First, the choice whether to go camping would reside with the crew, and once they decided to go on a camping trip the crew president (top youth officer of the crew) would ask one of his Venturer peers to become the activity chairperson for the campout. The remainder of the decisions through the planning phase, as well as throughout the camping weekend, would be in the hands of the Venturers. The crew advisor and the associate advisors would listen to the planning sessions and would consult with the crew president or another youth officer to provide suggestions and guidance. Rarely would the crew advisor speak directly to all of the Venturers in the crew during the planning process and camping trip. However, an advisor might provide unsolicited input when safety and health concerns could become an issue ("Hey, folks, that lightning in the sky is coming toward our campsite—lets secure our tents and get ourselves somewhere safe."). Moreover, an advisor would keep the methods of Venturing at the fore of the activities the Venturers chose to do (such as an advisor speaking to the crew's vice president for program: "Mary, since everyone said that scrambled eggs are boring, what do you think we could do with the food that we have to make tomorrow's breakfast more exciting? You could ask around to see if anyone else has ideas.").

Ultimately, crew advisors would be supporting the ideas of the crew and the crew officers as well as their well being.

How are advisors prepared for their roles working with older adolescents in the Venturing program? They follow the same training scheme as the adult volunteers with other BSA programs, with Venturing program-specific information inserted at the appropriate times. For a Venturing crew advisor to be considered fully trained, s/he must view three online training presentations of about one hour each: youth protection training about the policies and procedures related to preventing child abuse; *This is Scouting*, which presents the basic ideals, history, and organizational structure of the BSA; and *Venturing Crew Leader Fast Start* which provides the basics about Venturing crews and the program itself (Boy Scouts of America, 2010d). Crew advisors also must attend the five-hour long *Venturing Leader Specific Training*. If the crew plans to go camping and other overnight outdoor activities, the advisor must complete the weekend-long *Introduction to Outdoor Leader Skills*—the same training course that Boy Scout leaders must also take for their Boy Scout troop to be able to go camping. Because the Venturing Crew Leader Fast Start training is simply a briefing about the Venturing program that is ultimately repeated in the Venturing Leader Specific Training (VLST), and all of the other trainings are not specific to the Venturing program, it is the VLST that is the primary concern of this research study.

The VLST represents the only required training for Venturing crew advisors with content specific to the Venturing program, and it is scheduled for delivery in 305 minutes (just over 5 total hours) not including lunchtime or breaks. Because it is the only required training, the VLST could be the only training addressing specifics about the Venturing program that crew advisors ever sit through in their entire tenure with the BSA. Table 3-1 displays a breakdown of the time spent on the five component sessions of the training, and Appendix C offers a summary outline of the topics covered by the VLST. When summarizing the VLST training outline according to the

time allotted per topic, troubling facts become evident about the content of the training and the priority the organization has assigned to some topics over others. For example, Sessions One, Three, Four and Five represent information on policies, guidelines, and recommended methods for delivering the Venturing program, and totals 71% of the content of the VLST. Session Two, titled *Understanding and Protecting Youth*, represents 29% of the training. However, the bulk of Session Two, representing 21% of the entire VLST, revisits the BSA’s youth protection policies and guidelines—much of which were covered in the required hour-long online youth protection training for all BSA leaders. Another 5% of the overall training time is a group activity in Session Two where participants brainstorm the purpose of the Venturing program. The remaining 3% of the training, just over three allotted minutes per topic, accounts for the only training that crew advisors ever receive about “understanding” the youth who will be the target audience for their crew’s program. The titles of the three three-minute topics are *Adolescent Development Issues*, *Understanding Young Adults*, and *Leadership Styles for Advisors*.

Table 3-1: Venturing Leader Specific Training topic emphasis by time allotment.

| Venturing Leader Specific Training Session / Topic | Duration (minutes) | Percentage³ |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Session One – Here’s Venturing (introduction to program) | 45 | 15 |
| Session Two – Understanding and Protecting Youth | - | - |
| What is the purpose of Venturing? (group activity) | 15 | 5 |
| Adolescent Development Issues | 3.33 | 1 |
| Understanding Young Adults | 3.33 | 1 |
| Leadership Styles for Advisors | 3.33 | 1 |
| [Youth Protection Policies and Guidelines – 3 sections] | 65 | 21 |
| Session Three – Leadership and Organization | 50 | 16 |
| Session Four – Awards and Recognition | 60 | 20 |
| Session Five – Resources and Program Planning | 60 | 20 |
| Totals | 305 | 99 |

The trouble I saw with this training scheme for the crew advisors did not require a specialized analysis for it to be revealed. The aims and mission of the BSA declare that the organization’s programs will develop the characters of its youth members and the primary

responsibility for the development of the youth falls onto the shoulders of the adult volunteers who are the stewards of the program. How is it possible for those adult volunteers to learn everything that they would need to know about developing the characters of a group of 14-through-20-year-old coeds in ten total minutes of training time? The concepts of “building character” and “prepar[ing] young people to make ethical and moral choices” (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b), as they were stated in the aims and mission of the organization, are not topics that one would immediately assume to be associated with youth-planned trips and learning how to ski. There is surely a disconnect between the mission and vision of the organization and what the adult volunteers are trained to do in order to fulfill the organization’s stated intents.

While my personal experience has given me confidence in what the BSA can do for young people like me, it appears that the organization could be having greater effects. However, as I described in Chapter 2, there were noticeable deficiencies in the adult volunteers who made my experience in the BSA possible despite the overall goodness that I believe they brought to my upbringing. I notice a trend that where my personal experience as a youth and my observations as an adult volunteer converge show indicators of a systemic problem. If resolved, the lives of thousands of young people may be positively impacted. Exploring this problem, considering my role within it, and proposing methods to address it are the purposes of this research study.

Justification of a Training Improvement Approach

I generally believe that there is more than one way to accomplish a task, but from the outset of this research study I had identified that the concerns I have about the Venturing program could be addressed through improved training of the program’s adult volunteers. There could be other possible approaches for improving the outcomes that youth benefit from due to their crew advisors’ knowledgeable and skillful facilitation of activities that lead to personal growth. One

alternative could be the imposition of prerequisites for knowledge and skills in adult volunteers when they consider a top volunteer role (e.g. crew advisor), which would free the BSA from any responsibilities to train and develop their adult volunteers. Another alternative could be an explicit adoption of a policy that all “training” about working with youth comes from on-the-“job” experience, which would place emphasis on crew advisor tenure and the long-term training experiences of successors. I find both of these alternatives to be suboptimal for the reasons detailed below. Although my assumption that an enhanced training and education scheme would improve the outcomes for youth members of the Venturing program could be tied to my education and background in instructional design, there are three reasons that fit within the context and culture of the BSA.

The first reason why I seek to address my concerns about the adult volunteers in the Venturing program through enhanced training is that the perception of the necessity and benefits of training are already well ingrained into the culture of adult volunteers (and those who administrate the adult volunteers) in the BSA. Not to be glib, but the BSA has a training for everything: basic and advanced trainings for adult leaders, camping skills training, liquid fuels training, risk management training, severe weather training, fundraising training, driving groups of kids training—if it is a skill that is relevant to any of the BSA programs, the BSA will have a training for it. While many trainings are optional and are available solely for the edification and benefit of the adult volunteers, some trainings are required, such as the basic trainings for adult volunteers serving in top adult roles in BSA programs (like the VLST for crew advisors that was previously mentioned). From my perspective, my concerns are not with the quantity or accessibility of the training but with the content of existing training courses not being well targeted to the particular expectations that the BSA places upon its Venturing crew advisors in particular. The training culture exists, so that culture need not be changed; instead the training opportunities should be better aligned with the aims and mission of the BSA programs.

Following on from the existence of the training culture, a second reason why I assume that training enhancement will better prepare crew advisors for fulfilling the aims and mission of the BSA is that other large-scale youth development organizations address similar concepts in their own training contexts. At the end of this chapter is a summary of interviews I conducted with training administrators from the Girl Scouts of the USA and from 4-H. The Girl Scouts have released a new national training scheme in the past few years that aims to prepare adult volunteers to support the personal growth and development of their youth members. The 4-H has also produced training content that addresses adult volunteers' role in supporting the personal growth of youth (e.g. Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National 4-H Council, National Network for Youth, & Youth Leadership Institute, 2003), but the delivery of that training content is at the discretion of the local 4-H administration. While the program and activity methods of these other organizations differ from the BSA, their overall dedication to youth are close matches to the BSA, and if they are offering trainings about adult volunteers supporting youth development, the BSA would benefit from minding their examples.

My third reason for addressing my concerns about the preparation of adult volunteers in the Venturing program as a training issue relates to the general good nature of adult volunteers who work with youth that I have both benefitted from and supported first hand: adult volunteers who choose to serve a youth organization generally want to do what is best for the youth, they simply need to know what it is that they should be doing. Adult volunteers arrive to the BSA from all walks of life, representing a wide array of educational and professional backgrounds, meaning that not everyone arrives to the BSA having studied or worked in jobs related to youth development, adolescent psychology, community programming, and the like. While many of these adult volunteers chose to serve the BSA because their own child is a member, parenthood is not necessarily a qualification for knowing what to do to support the development of young people, especially when most of the young people the adult volunteers will serve will not be their

own children. The BSA has produced such a large quantity of training offerings because there are adult volunteers within the organization who are willing to attend them, and because the content of the trainings add value to one or more of the BSA's programs. At the same time, these trainings are intended to ensure a relatively consistent delivery of the BSA's programs across every neighborhood of the USA. Enhancing the content of a particular BSA training program therefore becomes the most accessible first attempt at making the outcomes for youth members of the BSA's programs more consistent, given the existence of both the organizational culture for training and the wide variety of adult volunteers coming to the program who seek training in skills for which they do not have the educational or professional background.

Foundations for Research

In terms of the conduct of scientific research, the identification of the problem that I perceived from my experience and observations in the BSA and the selection of my approach toward addressing that problem were each relatively small steps. Defining the problem in terms that could be compared and contrasted with existing research would allow me to design a viable research study and tie this volunteer-driven youth-focused educational community program to other programs that may have been studied in the past. Since the Venturing program in particular had not been the focus of any widely accessible research studies, I would need to rely on results from research in other contexts. My analysis of the problem pointed to three basic questions for framing the research study that I believed would recommend potential solutions for solving it. The first question, "Is there really something wrong with the training?" focused my attention on verifying the concerns I had about the emphases and time allotments of the VLST. The second question, "What would adult volunteers need to know in order to fulfill the aims and mission of the BSA?" explored the content that crew advisors would need to learn in order to be optimally

prepared for helping youth who were of older adolescent age to experience personal growth. Feasibility was the topic of the third question, as I wanted to know if it was possible for the aims and mission of the BSA to be achieved according to the “hands-off” expectation that the Venturing program has for its crew advisors. I asked, “Is the Venturing program able to teach character growth to its Venturers?” The next three sections describe existing research literature that answers those questions and frames the possibility for addressing the problem identified here.

Instructional Design Congruence

When I found the question, “Are the needs and goals of the organization congruent with those in the instruction?” (Dick & Carey, 1996, p. 324), I knew I had found the right topic to describe the problems I saw in the VLST. *Congruence* in instructional design refers to an alignment of the goals for instruction with the strategy for the instruction with the assessment of what was learned from the instruction (Dick & Carey, 1996; Smith & Ragan, 1999). If instructional content were to be developed using a systematic approach, congruence would be achieved when “what is taught is what is needed for learners to achieve stated goals for learning and that evaluation will be accurate and appropriate” (Smith & Ragan, 1999, p. 9). Congruence represents a strategy for optimizing instruction and ensuring that the skills needed by the learners are actually taught by the instruction delivered.

Let us reframe the VLST problem in terms of congruence. The aims and mission of the BSA serve a similar purpose as the learning goals for a course at a school. The organization intends to have every youth in its programs achieve its aims and mission, and since adult volunteers are the front-line representatives of the organization responsible for delivering the program, then the adult volunteers are the people who need to have the skills necessary for achieving the aims and mission. A training program would be beneficial as it would ensure that

all adult volunteers have the skills necessary for delivering a program that fulfills the aims and the mission of the organization. After reviewing the VLST it was discovered that the training program does not adequately teach the skills that would be most useful for fulfilling the aims and mission of the organization. Furthermore, the assessment that should be congruent with the instructional goals and the instructional content was, in this case, the BSA's concept of being a "fully trained" leader. Once a crew advisor completed the VLST, the organization considered that advisor to be fully trained, and no additional trainings require the crew advisor's attendance. The end result of the incongruous instruction provided by the VLST is an absence of components that render the volunteers and the program less effective than it promised to be: the BSA believes the youth of its Venturing program achieve the organization's aims and mission, but since the crew advisors were never provided with the skills necessary for helping youth achieve the aims and mission, the organization, the Venturers, the crew advisors, and all other stakeholders all believe the program to be effective, when in actuality it was impossible for the program to be effective at achieving its stated goals.

There is also an additional facet of congruence regarding the methods by which the crew advisors were trained. Shuchat-Shaw (1980) describes this facet of congruence as

the need to correlate content and methodology, to create a process for learning appropriate for that which is to be learned, and to develop a process that utilizes and exemplifies the very principles and concepts upon which the subject matter at hand is based (p. 179).

In Venturing program terms, crew advisors sit in their VLST for five hours. There are interactive games and activities, but the overall training presentation and setting does not match what an advisor would be expected to make happen in her/his Venturing crew. While the crew advisors sit still for five hours, listen to presenters, and watch slideshows and videos, they are expected to not have any crew meetings or activities with their Venturers that resemble the same delivery of the VLST training session. While this incongruence is less of a concern than the content that is

glossed over by the VLST it is still worth noting because the adult volunteers who come to the Venturing program may not fully recognize that this incongruence exists. They may naturally choose to follow the example that they see during their VLST.

If the concept of congruence can help diagnose the problem with the VLST, it could also indicate potential solutions for the problem. At issue are problems with the VLST's content and the delivery of the training. The missing content is related to preparing crew advisors to help Venturers learn how to "make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes" and help them "build character". The VLST's delivery, on the other hand, does not match well with the expectations crew advisors should fulfill with regard to fun, activity level, and youth-centeredness. And in the case of both content and delivery, the VLST emphasizes the protection of youth from harm more than it addresses advisors abilities to help bring the aims and mission of the program into the lives of the youth. Therefore, the knowledge and skills that advisors should know in order to deliver the aims and mission to their crew's Venturers should be compared and contrasted with what the VLST actually teaches crew advisors.

Positive Youth Development

The aims and mission of the BSA strive to represent the organization as a positive influence in the lives of American youth while also encouraging all stakeholders to be dedicated to the cause for improving society one youth at a time. The aims and mission also focus the effort adult volunteers in the BSA on the present for the benefit of the future. Specifically, the aims and mission hope to provide young people with experience and lessons that promote choices that keep them safe, happy, and benevolent members of society. The intents of the organization align well with the theory and practice of positive youth development.

The field of positive youth development “is comprehensive in its scope, linking a variety of: (1) ecological contexts (e.g., relationships, programs, families, schools, neighborhoods, congregations, communities) to (2) the production of experiences, supports, and opportunities known to (3) enhance positive developmental outcomes” (Benson & Pittman, 2001). Working in this field are community programs, professionals who support youth, researchers, policy advocates and legislators, as well as parents, law enforcement and elected officials. Overall, positive youth development (PYD) is as much a movement within American society, seeking to improve the condition of youth, as it is an area of research and profession (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma Jr., 2006). The BSA has not made any formal ties to PYD research and advocacy, but officials from the BSA are members of youth advocacy organizations that seek to coordinate the research, practice, and policy of youth-serving programs across the USA (Wellen, 2009). Despite the absence of a formal acknowledgement of PYD as a goal of its programs, the BSA strives for the same outcomes as the PYD paradigm. Thus, the BSA can be considered a PYD organization.

The purpose of PYD is to help youth, especially teens, prepare for a successful transition to adulthood (Lerner, 2007). The successful transition to adulthood is made possible when five strengths are present in young people, known as the “Five Cs” (Benson, et al., 2006), which I will present as an outline excerpted from Richard Lerner’s book *The Good Teen* (2007):

- ❑ *Competence*: the ability to act effectively in school, in social situations, and at work
- ❑ *Confidence*: an internal sense of overall self-worth and efficacy
- ❑ *Connection*: positive bonds with people and social institutions
- ❑ *Character*: respect for society and cultural rules, an inner moral compass
- ❑ *Caring*: a sense of sympathy and empathy for others and a commitment to social justice (Lerner, 2007, p. 35)

The goals of PYD, are to nurture the Five Cs. By building up these strengths in people when they are young, they will have the ability to function independently and make choices that help them to avoid risky behavior and situations that would hinder their ability to flourish in their personal, professional, and civic lives. Lerner, Benson, and others (Benson, 2007; Benson, et al., 2006; Lerner, 2005, 2007) have characterized the flourishing of people in their young adult lives as the “Sixth C”, namely *contribution*. Contribution is therefore the target characteristic that PYD hopes that its programs will develop in young people—by nurturing the Five Cs, the Sixth C becomes a character trait in young adults.

The ultimate question for the Five Cs is then, “how can they be grown in youth?” By analyzing all of the parenting how-to approaches, Lerner (2007) developed what he called “The Big Three” opportunities that teens should have in their lives:

- ☐ Have sustained, positive interactions with adults
- ☐ Participate in structured activities that enable them to develop valued life skills
- ☐ Become leaders of valued community activities (p. 39)

What is surprising about The Big Three is that they are not dependent solely on the parents and interactions with positive, non-parental adults are key for the positive personal developmental trajectory for youth. Furthermore, it appears that the Venturing program of the BSA aligns with the Big Three in that crew advisors have the potential to play a vital role in the development of their Venturers.

The Big Three represent the broad-brush qualities of the Venturing program, but they are not very specific when it comes to the actions and interventions that people like crew advisors could offer to youth to help grow their Five Cs. However, the *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents* (Benson, 2007; Lerner & Benson, 2003) provide an objective look at how youth can be prepared to become contributors to society and live a positive, happy, healthy life. The 40

Assets as they are called (see Appendix A) are divided into operational categories that can be assessed for their presence or absence in youth programs as well as in individuals themselves (Benson, 2007). After surveying more than 217,000 youth, Benson (2007) found that youth who self-report higher degrees of strength in their Five Cs are able to identify more of the individual assets in their lives.

The particular importance of the 40 Assets to the Venturing program and to the crew advisors is the union of positive context, representing the environment for positive development, with the people who nurture positive and caring relationships with the youth (Benson, 2007). While the BSA and the Venturing program, in particular, intend to create that fusion of context and people, it does not appear to prepare its crew advisors for understanding and valuing these necessary ingredients for the positive development of youth. Since the 40 Assets, the Big Three, and other empirically based concepts of youth development are not a factor in the BSA's training and materials for the Venturing program, there is a need to ascertain what strengths are being grown by the program. Also, there is a need to examine the potential for preparing crew advisors to address concepts like the 40 Assets in their crew programs.

Nonformal Learning

Positive youth development emphasizes the importance of the setting provided by youth development programs. The setting should be one where youth can experience structured activities, can have the opportunity to lead peers, and can have positive interactions with adults. The elements of the Big Three address the characteristics of the social environment, and the 40 Assets provide ingredients that, when added to a positive social context, could have a lasting effect on the development of young people. In the midst of all of the contextual factors, the young people still need to learn new knowledge and skills. In other words, the youth cannot be asked to

sit in a circle and repeat the Five Cs until committing them to memory; they need something to do so that the skills can be observed, rehearsed, reinforced, and ultimately learned. With all of their awards, ranks, and badges, the BSA is particularly adept at giving young people topics to learn and incentives for learning them. And while the Venturing program allows members to make a choice about what they learn, earn, and do, even if the youth do not choose to pursue established advancement opportunities, crews are encouraged by the methods of Venturing to have a continual flow of new information, skills, and opportunities, and to make an effort to recognize knowledge and skill achievements of Venturers.

Learning is taking place in the Venturing program, but the structure of the learning environment is quite different from the high school and college learning environments that most 14-through-20-year-olds have experienced. In fact, my personal observations during my tenure with the Venturing program have led me to believe that some youth who may have lost enthusiasm toward their high school and college learning environments find that the Venturing provides them with opportunity to learn in their own ways, at their own pace, and about topics they choose. On the other side of this scenario are the crew advisors, who do not go into every meeting with a lesson plan and the goal of teaching every Venturer a particular skill. Crew advisors are expected to be dynamic and to support the needs and interests of the youth. While they are not expected to know everything that the youth could possibly want to learn, they are supposed to dedicate their effort toward finding the people and resources that can help the Venturers learn what they seek.

Learning is not bound to the classroom, nor is it limited to explicitly defined educational presentations and materials—and these characteristics are the Venturing program's strength. However, the concept of instructional congruence calls attention to not only what content is learned in relation to the program's goals but also how that content is presented. While many of the topics and skills that interest Venturers are active, crew advisors receive little in the way of

positive examples provided by their VLST experience that would prepare them for supporting the Venturing program learning context. If people have only experienced “learning” in their school and college experience, what they understand about learning, and about teaching others, may be limited in its scope.

A few concepts from the theory and research of education would be helpful for crew advisors and other adult volunteers to know and understand when working with youth. The continuum of informal-nonformal-formal learning (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973) would be particularly useful for preparing adults to set up and facilitate the learning experiences of the Venturers in their crew. Informal learning, also known as free-choice learning, is the most common type of learning in which people engage (Falk & Dierking, 2002). This type of learning experience is “chronically underrecognized” according to Falk and Dierking (2002) because:

As a society, we have developed this bad habit of assuming that learning is only that thing we do in school. Now, as well as historically, most Americans acquire most of the knowledge, understanding, and information they require for their daily lives outside of school (p. 10).

Informal learning is based on the choices of individuals, and their learning efforts are usually self-directed. Visiting a museum, seeking books from the library, and searching for information on the Internet are all common methods of informal learning. Just as the description implies, this is the least structured form of learning.

Formal learning (or formal education), on the other hand, is the most structured form of learning, and is typically synonymous with school or college-based learning. Formal learning contexts are hierarchically structured, chronological, graded, and usually administrated by an institution that certifies that the learner has satisfactorily achieved an established level of knowledge (Coombs, et al., 1973). Formal learning is often used to prepare people for a profession, or to perform some set of skills that have high stakes—those that usually require licensure or certification even if they are not for pay. For example, just like a professional

paramedic's training for her career, a volunteer firefighter who chooses to complete an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) course must still pass an established (usually state-administered) examination in order to legally respond to emergencies in an ambulance. Formal education also involves standards for achievement, meaning that the learner does not choose when she is "finished" learning that topic, but rather the instructor, or the school, or some governmental agency determines the thresholds for successful completion. Thus, if the volunteer firefighter wanted to be certified by her state in her EMT skills then she would need to perform those skills to a level that satisfied her instructor.

In the middle, then, is nonformal learning, which has characteristics resembling both of the other types of learning contexts. The programs of the BSA fit the definition of nonformal learning, defined by Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) as "any organized educational activity outside the established formal system—whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity—that is designed to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives" (p. 11). The Venturing program is organized, takes place outside of schools, targets an identified clientele (coeds age 14 through 20), and aims to meet identified learning objectives. While formal and informal learning elements have their place within the Venturing program, the overall context would be considered nonformal.

What characteristics of a nonformal learning context would we see in the Venturing program? First, consider the Venturers, the learners themselves. They are able to enter and leave the program as they please, in that there is no legal or contractual obligation for them to continue with the program. Maintaining their participation requires the activities of the program to be interesting, and the general environment of the crew to be enjoyable. They also need to be willing to prioritize the program over other competing activities that are connected to their schools, communities, and other institutions, which would mean that what they do with the crew should have a value that they recognize. The program of the crew is a second consideration. While the

youth may choose the activities and adventures they wish to pursue together as a crew, they are held to expectations for properly implementing techniques and skills in ways that do not danger themselves and others. They are also expected to pursue their activities properly and skillfully so that the Venturers can develop a sense of independent appreciation for the activity, possibly to carry it with them as a hobby into their adult lives. Lastly, a third consideration is the interdependence of the youth in the crew, where they would not be able to successfully participate in the Venturing program without working with and learning from others. The group focus of the program provides a dynamic structure that can adjust to the needs of the group, and it is this structure that represents some of the most important outcomes sought by the Venturing program.

Summary: The Venturing Program's Problem

The Venturing program has a problem in that its outcomes are happening by chance, and not by design. We know this because the chain of knowledge and skills necessary for making the BSA's aims and mission possible to achieve are not being provided in a meaningful way to the adult volunteers who hold the primary responsibility for delivering the program. Without training in skills related to positive youth development, the adult volunteers lack a prescription for converting strategy into action—for turning aims and mission into particular activities that can be done at crew meetings and other activities.

The suggestion of chance, however, implies that youth may be achieving the aims and mission of the organization despite the lack of a sound chain of training and preparation. It is chance that crew advisors would know skills that would enable them to grow the Five Cs in the Venturers and facilitate the crew's operations so that it provides the youth with the Big Three. My personal experience in the BSA allows me to believe that the organization is achieving its aims and mission. I have observed Venturers learning knowledge and skills that are both useful and

fun, and I have watched them teach others and apply what they know on their own time. Despite the theoretical model that would say that the program was not meeting its own aims and mission, successes small and large are occurring.

Since the BSA's existing design for the delivery of the Venturing program has crew advisors playing the pivotal role as the steward of the program and the organization's intents, they represent the primary factor by which Venturers achieve the aims and mission of the organization. In other words, it may not be the characteristics of the program that influence whether or not the youth experience personal growth from their experience in the Venturing program, but rather the influential factor may be the characteristics of the crew advisor. Due to the deficiencies in the VLST that were discussed earlier, we know that the training that crew advisors receive is not providing them with the knowledge and skills they would need to achieve the organization's goals. This means that they must bring the knowledge and skills with them or they must be learning those skills while serving as a crew advisor. The personal profile of typical adult volunteers who become crew advisors are not well known as we cannot trace the outcomes of the program back to their skills and abilities or to the source of their skills and abilities. Thus, through the current research project, I hope to better understand Venturing crew advisors, their abilities to facilitate positive youth development within youth programs.

Research Questions: Framing and Driving the Research Study

Venturing crew advisors play the key role in the Venturing program. The purpose of this research study is to explore what crew advisors know, where they learned what they know, and how they use what they know to guide their crews. Importantly, the value of crew advisors' experience cannot be overlooked as their service on the "front lines" of the Venturing program may have given them insight about the program that the BSA has yet to acknowledge. My goal as

a researcher with obvious personal ties to the BSA and the Venturing program is to use my background knowledge to engage with crew advisors. I want to hear their reflections upon their own experience and to learn their perceptions about crew advisors in general. Given that there was not an existing base of information that described the generic profile of crew advisors and the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they bring to the Venturing program, I took a naturalistic approach to the research, limiting the amount of prior assumptions that I made about crew advisors, and creating the opportunity to hear first hand and without filter their takes on their role within the program.

The following three research questions were designed to address the problem I identified during the conceptualization of the research study. The research questions served as a mechanism to narrow down the interview questions about specific topics. I have included a paragraph regarding the intent of the question after each research question. This allowed me to clarify for myself and for the readers the envisioned outcome I had for each question. Overall, the research questions were used as points of reference throughout this report.

What perceptions do Venturing BSA crew advisors have about crew advisors' capabilities for facilitating the positive development of the Venturers within their crews?

(RQ1) The intent of this research question was to explore whether adult volunteers serving as crew advisors would have the potential to support the personal development of young people. Since the advisors had not been explicitly charged with facilitating youth development through their crew program and activities, I needed to have a better idea of the considerations that crew advisors had while they worked with Venturers in their crews. I also explored whether crew advisors were ready to receive training and guidance to use in the Venturing program as a catalyst for the youths' personal growth, as opposed to the program serving as an ongoing set of activities that entertain the youth.

How would experienced crew advisors improve the basic training program (curriculum) for their role within the Venturing program? (RQ2) The intent of RQ2 was to gather suggestions from the participants regarding improvements that could be made to the basic training for Venturing crew advisors. Their suggestions for improvement would indicate the shortcomings of the training that they had received based on their own experience within the program. When contrasted with their own personal experiences, those suggestions could also identify knowledge and skills that could be taught directly to new crew advisors in hopes of hastening their abilities to provide effective advisement that supports the personal development of young people.

What are Venturing crew advisors' perceptions regarding the value of resources produced outside of the BSA, and how could those resources could be integrated into advisor training curricula? (RQ3) This research question was developed to assess the participants' willingness to learn from materials and resources that were not directly related to the Venturing program and produced by the BSA. Since I am interested in introducing new concepts to the BSA that originate in scholarly literature and other youth-focused organizations, I needed to know whether crew advisors would have any interest in learning the same information and skills that I assume would be useful to their roles in the Venturing program.

Research Question Refinement Process

The research questions presented above represent the refined version of the questions that guided my data analysis and the report you read here. The research questions I had composed earlier in the research process were:

- ☐ What perceptions do Venturing BSA crew advisors have about their own capabilities for facilitating the positive development of the Venturers within their crews?

- ❑ How would experienced crew advisors improve the basic training program/curriculum for their role within the Venturing program?
- ❑ How can a research-based (or academic) theory like Positive Youth Development be “packaged” so that typical crew advisors will find it useful for guiding and influencing their interaction and activities with adolescents?

While presenting the preliminary findings of this research study, a class of fellow students and one of my doctoral review committee members suggested that these initial research questions were not representative of what I actually intended to learn as a result of the study. With their suggestions I refined the wording of the research questions to better align with my intent, and to more precisely identify the participant data of particular interest within the interviews.

Crew Advisors Representing Adult Volunteers in General

The design of this research study was suggested by an existing style of qualitative research known as basic interpretive qualitative research. Merriam (2002) suggests that “a central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (p. 37), and to that end, “a basic interpretive study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 38). The interviews with the participants allowed me to ask questions that would help me develop a narrative explaining the understanding that crew advisors have about their role in the context of their Venturing crews and within the BSA. By focusing on the perceptions of the advisors as the research questions suggest, the dialogue with the advisors

told me not just what the advisors know about their “worlds” as crew advisors and what they believe crew advisors are capable of providing in the way of positive development for youth.

One of the inherent limitations of qualitative research studies is the generalizability of the findings from the setting where the research was conducted to other settings with similar characteristics. Generalizability is desirable when it is possible to conduct research with a sample, and have the results of that research apply to a much larger population. However, generalizable studies require a large sample size. Since this study is focusing on the participants’ interpretation and understanding of their worlds as crew advisors, it would be difficult to achieve true generalizability given that each human being has a unique set of experiences that help them make sense of their worlds.

On the other hand, I do believe that the crew advisors who were the participants in this study are indicators of the worldview held by many crew advisors, as well as indicators of many adult volunteers who work with youth programs. I believe this because of the broad and unspecific criteria that an adult volunteer must satisfy in order to become a crew advisor with the BSA. Since the BSA does not screen for any type of prior experience, educational specialty, or other qualifications, the men and women over the age of 21 who can pass a background check and attend a few hours of trainings could also, just as easily, join and become the leader of many other youth-focused programs. And while programs and people may not be universally interchangeable, meaning that every person might not be the best match with every youth program, people tend to know themselves well enough to quickly assess whether they would enjoy working with a given program in a given situation. Thus, I have to believe that while the people who become crew advisors with the Venturing program enjoy working with the Venturers, they could have just as easily become a leader of another youth program with the same set of skills and experiences that they brought to Venturing.

A second argument for the generalizability of the findings of this research to the training of adult volunteers in other youth development organizations are the common ideals and challenges inherent in the concept of positive youth development. Any organization that aims to support the positive development of its youth members through the efforts of adult volunteers will need to provide skills training to those adult volunteers in order to prepare them for purposeful interactions with young people. Other youth organizations that operate in neighborhoods alongside the BSA are attempting to attract both youth members and adult volunteers with generally the same characteristics as the youth and adults the BSA hopes to recruit. Since the characteristics of the youth and adults who belong to different community organizations in the same community would not vary too greatly, logically we could argue that all of the positive youth development-focused organizations in a community would have the same challenges for preparing adult volunteers to facilitate similar outcomes for all youth despite the differences in the programs' activity focus (i.e. outdoor adventure focus, agricultural education focus, leadership development focus, community service focus, etc.). Since the research reported here was aimed at adult volunteers who facilitated positive youth development, and not necessarily on program or organization specific methods for facilitating positive youth development, then the findings of this research could be generalized to adult volunteers in other youth organizations. Chapter 4's discussion of trustworthiness and credibility of this research further addresses the topic of generalizability.

Because the root of the problem that I identified with the Venturing program relates to the training of crew advisors, I wanted to learn about the adult volunteer training methods of other youth-focused organizations. I sought out local professionals who were directly involved with the training of adult volunteers in two organizations that were prominent near me: the 4-H, and the Girl Scouts of the USA. My interviews with representatives from both organizations were strategic. The conversations focused on the broad details of their organizations' approaches to

training adult volunteers so that those volunteers could deliver the programs to the youth according to the organization's intent.

4-H Adult Volunteer Training

The 4-H is a youth program connected to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is described as “a community of more than 6.5 million young people across America learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills” with programs and clubs in schools, camps, community organizations, and after-school care facilities (National 4-H Council (U.S.), 2010). 4-H programs provide youth with hand-on learning activities supported by the latest research of Land grant universities in three program foci: healthy living, citizenship, and science, engineering and technology. Nationally, the 4-H has 538,000 volunteers throughout all of its programs.

Ms. Toni Stuetz, the Penn State University Cooperative Extension 4-H Coordinator for Chester County (in southeastern Pennsylvania), helped me understand an important characteristic about the 4-H: because it is a government entity simultaneously tied to federal, state, county, and municipal politics and concerns, very little about the 4-H program is standardized across the entire country. The training of adult volunteers varies from place to place. This variation occurs state to state and even from county to county within a state. Her description of the training that she has done for adult volunteers was based on her experience in Chester County over the past 13 years.

Ms. Stuetz has based her training of 4-H volunteers on observations she has made about the needs of clubs and club leaders. There is not a national syllabus for her to deliver, but she has received notices from national and state administrations about the need to teach volunteers about important policies relating to club finances and protecting the health and safety of youth. She usually trains new club leaders face-to-face, just a few people at a time, and it could happen at

someone's kitchen table or at a coffee shop. From time-to-time she will organize an event to gather club leaders from across the county. Generally these organized events are to update them about new 4-H policies, procedures, and program materials, or to refresh their memories on some skills that she believes need to be reinforced. Since Ms. Stuetz travels around the county on a frequent basis delivering programs to clubs and schools, she makes an effort to visit every 4-H club at least once or twice a year even if she briefly greets the leaders during the club's regularly scheduled meeting time. However, she does most of her meetings by appointment and she is willing to schedule meetings with club leaders whenever the need arises, and as often as the club leader (reasonably) needs. Ms. Stuetz's role as a cooperative extension educator is to connect people with resources. This means she spends much of her time connecting club leaders to people and materials in order to support the program that the youth participate in.

Without a standardized training curriculum for adult volunteers who serve as 4-H club leaders, much of the club's program relies on the existing knowledge and the resourcefulness of those club leaders. Since many club programs are focused on specialties of agriculture such as poultry raising or gardening, those club leaders often come to the program with knowledge of those specialties. They join 4-H to volunteer to work with youth using their existing knowledge and experience. However, Ms. Stuetz is willing to work with adult volunteers who arrive without any agricultural expertise as the 4-H has program support materials covering a broad range of topics within their healthy living, citizenship, and science, environment and technology foci.

The training of adult volunteers with the 4-H appears to differ from the BSA's training methods in some important ways. First, a professional staff member supporting the program is the one providing the training to the adult volunteers. This method supports fidelity in the delivery of information in that the limited number of people providing the training helps maintain the accuracy of the information that people are receiving. Second, the absence of a nationally standardized training syllabus for adult volunteers introduces the possibility for information to

vary from one location to the next, even within the same state. However, the lack of a national standard helps ensure that the training is customized and relevant to the needs of the youth and the volunteers in the local community, allowing 4-H programs to be more readily supportive of changes in the demographics of the local area. The potential to maintain the relevance of the program to the community combined with the personal attention that comes from the professional staff member responsible for the program allows the 4-H adult volunteer training model to provide the information necessary to preserve the 4-H ideals without burdening club leaders with a quantity of required trainings.

GSUSA Adult Volunteer Training

The Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) organization has been separate from the BSA since each program was founded in the early 20th century. The organizations share some of the same values as well as the dedication to youth, but their ideals and their program methods are distinct. Ms. Jennifer Allebach is the director of adult development for the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania (GSEP), and is responsible for ensuring that every adult volunteer of her council is trained and prepared to deliver the Girl Scout program as it was designed by the officials of the program's national headquarters. Ms. Allebach has a staff of about eight professionals who work with her to develop training and program materials and to train the volunteer training staff.

The GSEP is able to customize its training materials and methods according to methods that work for their local service area. Training materials are produced as a hybridized effort between the national headquarters and the councils across the country. The national headquarters staff produces boilerplates of the training materials that are distributed as editable digital files to the local councils. Within the boilerplate materials, some content can be customized, and some must remain standard to ensure that accurate information regarding the policies and methods of

the GSUSA is delivered to all of the volunteers across the country. Ms. Allebach and her staff customize the training materials with information specific to the GSEP, including property information, staff member names and contact information, as well as council-specific policies and guidelines related to the Girl Scouts' iconic cookie sale.

Once Ms. Allebach and her staff approve the final draft of the training materials (updated every year), they select a team of volunteers from neighborhoods across the entire GSEP service area to serve as trainers. The GSEP's professional staff assembles all of the selected trainers. The selected trainers receive a training about how to deliver the council's basic training curriculum to troop leaders in each of the trainers' home areas.

The GSUSA uses a three-step training process for preparing adult volunteers to work with Girl Scouts in their local troops. The first step is the *GSUSA Online Volunteer Orientation* that is free for the volunteer and can be taken at any time. The training is designed to increase the volunteers' familiarity with the history and the philosophy of Girl Scouting, teach volunteers how they can incorporate the organization's "three keys"—Discover, Connect, Take Action—into troop/group activities, and to provide an overview of program specifics. The online orientation is administered nationally, but information about completion is communicated by the GSEP. The second step is an in-person workshop called *GSEP Volunteer Essentials*, and is designed to introduce new volunteers to their roles and responsibilities when starting and leading a Girl Scout troop/group. The "Step 2" training also addresses administrative details about forms to fill out, troop/group finances and record keeping, and guidelines for taking girls on field trips away from the troop's normal meeting place. The "Step 3" training is called *Girl Scout Leadership Essentials*, and is a three-hour group-based training that focuses on the specific details related to the age-based program of the Girl Scouts. Particularly relevant to my research study, this training provides volunteers with "insight to common developmental and behavioral characteristics of girls within your targeted grade level" as well as "how to organize and conduct fun and effective

meetings” and to “facilitate the girl/adult partnership and how to build the leadership skills in the girls” (Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania, 2009, p. 8-10). Volunteers re-take the Step 3 training each time they change the grade levels of the program that they support. Essentially, a Girl Scout leader who is following her daughter through the program would take the Step 3 training for Daisy leaders (serving Kindergarten and first-graders) at year one, and then at year 3 would take Step 3 training again for Brownie leaders (serving second and third graders).

The Girl Scouts represent the best of both approaches between the BSA and the 4-H. They have nationally produced materials to ensure consistency and fidelity of their training message, but Girl Scout councils may customize those materials to meet the needs of the youth, volunteers, and communities within their service area. They also have professional staff involved with the training process like the 4-H, but the Girl Scouts still maintain the volunteer-on-volunteer training contact like the BSA. The most striking characteristic of the Girl Scouts’ training is the provision of age-specific information about the developmental and behavioral characteristics of youth each time an adult volunteer changes the age group (grade level) of girls s/he works with. In this regard, the GSUSA excels beyond the BSA and the 4-H.

Summary: Indicating Adult Volunteers in General

Although similarities and differences exist in adult volunteer training methods and contents across the BSA, GSUSA, and 4-H, each organization takes average people, without an expectation of specific skills or experience, and trains them to become leaders of their programs. The adult volunteers with these programs are focused on developing a set of skills, abilities, and appreciations in the youth members. It is reasonable to believe that an adult volunteer with one of those programs could easily become an adult volunteer with each of the other programs. It is also reasonable to believe that the content (or absence thereof) within each organization’s adult

volunteer training curriculum has an impact on the outcomes experienced by the youth participants targeted by each program, especially when portions of that content focus on program objectives, methods, and other specifics. But, the training content provided by all of the organizations is not exhaustive, and the success of the volunteers at achieving the intents of the organization (like the aims and mission of the BSA) is still dependent upon other factors, such as the knowledge and skills that the volunteers bring from their personal histories.

Based on these observations about the adult volunteer training provided by the three organizations, I believe that Venturing crew advisors are an indicator of the adult volunteer population at large within American society. The findings of this study may not be generalizable so that they represent all possible adult volunteers, there is a degree of similarity among the adults who serve in these organizations to assume that the inferences that are made about the adult volunteers who join the BSA are similar with those that could be made about adult volunteers who join other organizations. With this in mind, the findings that emerged from this study served to inform the characteristics of the adult volunteers who join other organizations. Lastly, what was learned about preparing crew advisors for their role within the Venturing program suggested preparation and training methods for other youth programs.

² Since the Boy Scout program was the original program of the BSA, the organization's mission statement holds the Boy Scout Oath and Law as the guiding principles for the organization. The Venturing program has its own Oath and Code, but those credos share the same basic ideals as the Boy Scout Oath and Law. See Appendix D.

³ Percentages approximate due to rounding.

Chapter 4

Research Methods

This chapter describes the methods I used to gather the data that would help me answer the research questions outlined in the previous chapter.

Review and Approval

As a doctoral student of education at Penn State University, I was essentially a researcher in training. My “trainers” included the faculty members in my home department and other departments whose classes I took for six years of graduate study. At the final stage of traineeship, the stage where I conducted this research project, I had a review committee of four faculty members who already possessed their doctorates, and who had supervised the research of other students in the past. This committee reviewed my preliminary research design and methods, provided feedback for improvement, and approved my plans (and any amendments I made to the plans) throughout the life of the project. The committee members’ education and experience guided my efforts so that my research practice and reporting would meet contemporary standards for educational research in the academy.

The University also requires a review process for research studies like this one, where they strive to assure that the people who participate in such studies are protected from intentional and unintentional violations of their privacy, well-being, physical and mental health, legal and social status, financial status, and the like. The University’s Social Science Institutional Review Board (SSIRB) of the Office for Research Protections (ORP) reviewed and commented on my proposed methods for recruiting and compensating participants, conducting interviews with the

participants, maintaining their anonymity, and protecting their personal and private information. The methods for my study were approved on October 8, 2008 and assigned SSIRB number 20301.

At the conclusion of my research study, the doctoral review committee read and commented on drafts of this research report, and approved the final version of the document you are reading now.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The study participants were the most important ingredients of the entire design of my study, because it was their conversations with me about their personal background, perspectives, and experiences as a Venturing crew advisor that helped me answer the research questions that drove this inquiry. Since it was not feasible to collect information from every single crew advisor registered to the BSA, I had to choose carefully the crew advisors who would participate in this study, as they would provide information that would help me understand the characteristics of relatively successful Venturing crew advisors. I purposefully sought out crew advisors who could be deemed “relatively successful”, as opposed to random sampling of crew advisors. As an example of my personal criteria for “relatively successful” crew advisors, when I communicated with Venturing program colleagues to seek their recommendations for potential participants who I could approach about participating in this study, I asked them: (a) who out of the crew advisors that they had worked with implemented the Venturing program according to the BSA’s design and intention, (b) who had an active, fun, and adventurous crew program, (c) who had developed positive and supportive relationships with the Venturers in their crew, and (d) who had advised Venturers who became local examples of the benefits of Venturing program participation. These selection criteria were, by design, somewhat loose and subject to personal interpretation; the

looseness provided for a more conversational tone and allowed for me to have access to a broader range of participants than if formal and exact criteria had been established. While I did not expect any one crew advisor to fulfill every single detail of my personal criteria for relative success, I had hoped to find people who were implementing the Venturing program according to the program's design and methods that were expected from adult volunteers across the country, as well as people who were experiencing some observed success in terms of Venturers who grew to contribute to society.

My goal was to find adult volunteers who were serving as Venturing crew advisors to active Venturing crews at the time that we met. I also needed to ensure that the potential participants met the BSA's expectations for crew advisor training and performance, and that they had enough tenure in their role to be able to discuss authentic experiences that they had as crew advisors. The minimum expectations that potential study participants needed to satisfy distilled down to five initial criteria:

- ☐ Registration as the crew advisor of a Venturing crew (the BSA only allows people age 21 and over to register as a crew advisor)
- ☐ Completion of all training programs expected by the BSA for a crew advisor to be identified as "fully trained" (at the time of the recruitment to the study), including (1) Venturing Crew Advisor Fast Start Training, (2) BSA New Leader Essentials Training, (3) BSA Youth Protection Training, and (4) Venturing Leader Specific Training
- ☐ Tenure as a registered Venturing crew advisor for at least one calendar year
- ☐ Regular crew activity, with the crew that was advised by the potential participant holding regular meetings and activities for the Venturers (using an average of two meetings or activities per month in a calendar year as the minimum level of activity)
- ☐ Willingness to meet with me and discuss while being recorded their personal, professional, and BSA/Venturing specific background information relevant to the research study

Aside from these screening criteria related to each potential participant's personal profile, two additional criteria decided whether a potential participant was ultimately selected to participate in this research. Since my activity as a volunteer with the Venturing program went beyond the local council and through the national levels of the BSA, I had both direct and indirect access to potential recruits to participate in this study from a broad geographic area. Given this wide-ranging access, I recruited participants from various locations in order to overcome nuances in Venturing program delivery that might have been specific to one local council of the BSA, or other influences on the program that could be tied to political or geographic boundaries. I also needed some assurance that the potential participants had a strong working knowledge of the Venturing program, and that their peers considered their crew's program and operations to be successful at properly implementing the aims of the BSA and the methods of Venturing. To fulfill the expectation of overcoming locality-based nuances of the program, I ultimately recruited participants from a variety of cities and towns located in four BSA councils across four Mid-Atlantic States of the USA: Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

Achieving some form of assurance that the potential crew advisor participants were successful with their delivery of the Venturing program required one of two methods for each person, either a method that was based on my observation, or a method that was based on recommendations from key Venturing program leaders who had direct contact with the potential participant. For example, I made the acquaintance of some of the study participants when I served on the staff in the autumn of 2008 of a Powder Horn High Adventure Resource Course, an optional BSA training aimed at adult volunteers in the BSA with interest in learning more about conducting a fun and safe outdoor high adventure program for youth in their home troops and crews. After the training was complete, I contacted a few of the Powder Horn Course trainees with whom I had talked and worked with at some length. I asked them some follow-up questions

and was comfortable with each person's knowledge of the Venturing program and advisement skills.

For the participants who I had not met personally, I was connected through to them discussions with council-level volunteers and professionals (e.g. Council Venturing Committee Chairs or Council Venturing Program Staff Advisors) who support the Venturing crews in their councils. The council leaders identified potential participants and forwarded an e-mail message that I wrote to each recommended participant. The council leader did not include me in the forwarded e-mail message. The people who were interested in participating in my study contacted me by e-mail or telephone after reading the description of the study that was sent to them by their council leaders. After exchanging e-mails and telephone calls with details about participating in the study, the participants received a copy of the Informed Consent form, notifying them in writing of the study procedures, and their rights as a participant. If they had no disagreements with any of the terms on the form, we scheduled the meeting for our first interview.

Ultimately I recruited and completed a three-interview sequence with 10 crew advisors. Participants were offered a US\$25.00 gift certificate that could be given to their crews, which was redeemable at an outdoor or sporting goods store of their choice. Some participants refused compensation. Participants were assigned a pseudonym (an alias) to protect their identities. Likewise, identifying references to other people or location place names were obscured.

Participant Interviewing, Data Collection, and Sampling

I met with each study participant on three separate occasions to conduct three semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were delivered without a script, but instead with a list of questions that I asked to each participant. The order by which we covered the topics varied from participant to participant. This format allowed for a conversational tone between the

study participant and me, where we could exchange comments and ask each other for more information without feeling as though we were deviating from a prescribed order. For example, if a participant's reply to one question was connected to the topic of another question further down the list, I felt comfortable with our interview dialogue continuing the same line of thinking rather than stopping the participant's discussion about a topic in order to hit the next question on the list.

The guidelines for the content and conduct of the three-interview series came from Seidman's (2006) structure for in-depth interviewing. The questions that I asked were mostly open-ended, allowing for each participant to describe and reconstruct her/his experience with the topic of the question. Each of the three separate interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes in order to avoid tedium and burnout for both the participant and myself and to be respectful of the time they made available to me—sometimes during the middle of their workday, or at a time that was wedged between two other appointments. Appendix B provides the generic interview questions that I asked to each of the participants. Each interview's questions were grouped together according to Seidman's recommendations: the first interview focused on historical background of the participant, the second explored the details of each participant's experience as a crew advisor and the perceptions they have developed as a result of that experience, and the third interview prompted them to reflect on their experiences and project their vision into their future as adult volunteers and crew advisors. One of Seidman's recommendations, the spacing of the interviews, became particularly challenging to follow. Seidman recommended that three to seven days elapse between each of the three interviews, but that short timeframe became difficult to schedule due to scheduling conflicts and the logistics involved with me traveling five hours each way by car for a single interview. The time between successive interviews for this study varied from one to four weeks.

The audio of each interview was recorded with two small digital recorders. One of the recorders was placed in between the participant and I, and the other recorder had a wired lavalier

microphone that was attached to the clothing of the participant near their neckline. The two recorders provided redundancy in the event of an equipment failure, and to ensure that the audio would be accurately transcribed if the ambient noise of the interview setting distorted one of the recordings.

Maximum Variation Sampling

The 30 interviews yielded over 45 hours of recorded audio data for the set of 10 study participants. I researched, wrote, and analyzed the profiles of the original 10 participants and during that process I developed a sense that while the 10 people were surely unique individuals, there were a number of similarities between some of the participants' perceptions and perspectives of advising youth and volunteering with the Venturing program.

Patton (2002) describes *maximum variation sampling* as a method of selecting research study participants (sampling) that “identifies important common patterns that cut across variations” (p. 243) among a set of participants, and ultimately helps the researcher “cut through the noise of variation” (p. 243). This sampling method allows the researcher to “purposefully pick a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest” (p. 243), or in other words, to prevent the researcher from reporting repetitious findings across a larger set of participants in the study. After reviewing the profiles of the original ten study participants, I chose to reduce the number of participants by half, focusing on the five participants that were the most different from each other. The remaining participants' data and participation will be applied to future reports and publications of this research.

Determining which five participants to analyze for this report was more of an art than a science. I consulted Patton's (2002) description of the sampling method, members of my doctoral review committee, and a “critical friend” of the research study (described later in this chapter).

The consultation was helpful, but the choice was ultimately mine. My largest concern was having the participants, who were selected as relatively successful Venturing crew advisors to actually represent the spectrum of crew advisors who I have known and worked with during my involvement with the various levels of leadership of the Venturing program. Thinking about the participants' representativeness of the all of the relatively successful crew advisors I had been acquainted with drew my attention to a few inconsistencies in the profiles of my original set of ten participants. For example, I believed that the balance of male to female advisors was off (7:3). Also, the levels of formal educational attainment, the pertinence of some participants' formal education to advising youth, the biological age, the years of experience as a Venturing crew advisor, and general enthusiasm (an admittedly vague characteristic) were individual characteristics that seemed extraordinary of the crew advisors I have worked with throughout my time with the BSA. A demographic characteristic that I could not address was diversity in race and ethnicity, as all ten participants were white and non-Hispanic. While the BSA does not publicly release demographic details about its overall membership (Wellen, 2009), my personal experience has led me to believe that the vast majority of the adult volunteers involved with the Venturing program in the northeastern USA are white and non-Hispanic, quite simply because I rarely observe people of other races or ethnicities at Venturing events in that region of the country.

The maximally varied sample discussed in this research report included five participants, consisting of two women and three men representing the four states mentioned earlier. Their highest levels of formal educational attainment ranged from a high school graduation equivalency diploma (GED) to a master's degree, and the pertinence of the formal education and career experience for skills related to advising older adolescents in the Venturing program ranged from minimal (masonry and textiles) to ideal (a seminary master's degree with more than 25 years as a full-time youth pastor). The amount of experience as a crew advisor ranged from three to more

than eight years. These backgrounds as well as the perceptions of the five participants provide a well-rounded story of the relatively successful Venturing crew advisors that dot the landscape of the BSA, and their stories doubtlessly meet the needs of this research study.

Participant Profiles

The participants profiled below were the focus of my analysis for this report, and from this point forward all references to “the participants” refer to these five crew advisors. The profiles below are not written as comparisons. I made no effort to try to address the same categories of details across all of the participants. The goal of the profiles was to briefly introduce the most important characteristics of each of the individuals to help readers develop a macro-level understanding of each of the people, and what makes them tick, so to speak.

Dom

In a family of eight children, competition and cooperation go hand-in-hand. Knowing that the father of that household became an Eagle Scout in his youth and continued to be an avid outdoorsman and a dedicated advocate for young people throughout his adulthood, it was no surprise that the programs of the BSA become an intrinsic part of the entire family’s life. Dom is child number five in that family, and he is a product of the sibling competition and the family cohesion that could be expected from a family who all participate in the same activities together. Dom and his siblings spent much time in BSA programs during their youth, and his dedication to the BSA continues in adult roles to this day. As a 26-year-old advisor to two Venturing crews, Dom’s enthusiasm for Venturing is only overshadowed by his interest in helping the youth of his

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church) become responsible and upstanding leaders within their church, family, and society.

Dom became both an Eagle Scout and a Venturing Silver Award recipient in his youth, which is extraordinary for young people in general, but he said the accomplishments were not a big deal within his family. A few of his brothers earned the same awards (or the Exploring program equivalent awards before Venturing was launched by the BSA in 1998). His Eagle Scout award was presented at the same court of honor as one of his brothers. His sisters also earned the Venturing awards, and in the spirit of true sibling one-upmanship, his youngest brother earned the Sea Scout Quartermaster Award in addition to the Eagle Scout and Silver awards. Nowadays, as adult leaders in the BSA, Dom and one of his sisters cooperate to co-advise a co-ed community Venturing crew sponsored by their township's parks and recreation department. This community crew coordinates with the male-only crew that Dom advises within his LDS church's religious education program for young men.

Within the LDS church, the Boy Scouts of America programs are integrated into the church-designed religious education program for boys, which means that while youth learn and practice the church's religious tenets, they are also learning the skills and values promoted by the BSA. Young women in the LDS church have their own religious education program that is not integrated with any Scouting or other youth organization. Dom's father, a dedicated Scouting volunteer and church member, and the rest of Dom's family took a less-segregated approach to the LDS church and the BSA during the time that Dom and his siblings were youth. As Dom puts it, they "soaked a green stick in water so that they could bend it however they needed"—which is to say that while the boys and girls of the family participated in their church-provided programs, they also formed a community-based co-ed Venturing crew where the young women could also join as Venturers. Dom keeps the strategy alive by serving as the official advisor to these two crews—one in the church, and one in the community.

Just like Dom's BSA involvement as a youth, he remains quite active as an adult. As Dom says, "I've done everything!" Dom has attended every training program available for adult volunteers in the BSA, and he has even taken to delivering the Boy Scout and Venturing leader trainings as a trainer for his district. Dom also has achieved national BSA certifications as an aquatics instructor (i.e. boating, swimming, and water activities lifeguarding), a shooting sports instructor, and as a ropes course (i.e. challenge course) director for the BSA (what the BSA refers to as a COPE course, for Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience).

When I asked Dom why he sought out all of the BSA trainings, his first response was, jokingly, "Because I'm not married, and I don't have any kids!" He went on to say that he seeks the trainings partially due the independence afforded to him when he is knowledgeable of the health and safety issues that could affect his Scouting and Venturing youth. Since Dom's father was also active in training, especially in the area of shooting sports (rifles, shotguns, and archery), Dom often accompanied his father on these trainings, and as Dom grew older he transitioned from being his father's "gopher" (as in a helper asked to "*go for this, go for that*") to serving as a training assistant. "I've been teaching archery since I was 9 [years-old]," Dom said, so it was natural for him to seek out that certification when he reached the age that would allow him to instruct those skills independently (which is at age 21 in the BSA). Dom's depth of experience in the BSA has also helped him take to heart the Boy Scout motto of "Be Prepared" in his role as an advisor, which he said was his major reason for seeking out such a large number of trainings.

The collection of Dom's trainings from the BSA, however, is focused on concrete skills, and working with teenagers as their advisor in a Venturing crew is generally not considered to be concrete. I asked Dom how he would characterize his relationship with his Venturers, and he said, "We're a group of friends with an established pecking order. I am only 10 years older than some of these guys, but they now understand that I am responsible for their health and safety." Dom's age is indeed a factor he considers in his relationship with his Venturers:

My age is both a positive and a negative. It's a positive because I can relate to the boys—we often like the same things. When I first started as their advisor, and they saw the *Baby Stewie* sticker on the back of my truck and we had a conversation about [the Fox television network animated comedy sitcom] *Family Guy*, we started our relationship with a common bond that showed them that I could relate to them.... But [my young age] is a negative sometimes because they don't see me as an authority figure, and I have to put my foot down.

And despite Dom's biological youth as a Venturing crew advisor, his perspective of his role as an advisor appears to be wise and well developed. Dom said that his role as the crew advisor is to help his Venturers,

Know that they are cared about, and that there are other people out there who care about what decisions that they make. What they do in the crew doesn't just affect them, it affects other people in the crew. If they decide to be lazy and not come to a crew meeting—I want them to think of how many people they affected because they've not fulfilled their responsibility to their fellow crew members. They should do their job, to the best of their abilities, because people do count on them.

Dom's interest in helping his Venturers learn personal responsibility and seek out methods for helping others is an ongoing theme in the activities and lessons that come up with his crew at his church both during the religious education time, and during the Venturing program specific activities of the crew.

Such lessons about personal responsibility and helping others have helped Dom persevere through his educational and career accomplishments. While a teenager himself, Dom transferred from public school to home schooling to a private non-denominational Christian school. When his Bible class instructor told Dom that he “was going to hell because he was a Mormon”, Dom decided to enroll himself into a night school program that prepared him to pass the exams to receive a GED. When he completed his GED, he essentially finished high school at age 16. He then went to work for a home countertop installer who said that Dom had two weeks to learn how to polish granite or else Dom would be fired. By the end of that two weeks Dom was polishing granite better than his boss.

After a few years of working as a countertop installer and also taking on a second full-time job as a home entertainment system installer, Dom went on a two-year mission in Ireland as a Mormon missionary. The mission trip was cut short because Dom was injured when he was hit by a car, and subsequently, he was sent home to recover with his family's support. Within a few months of his return home, he and a colleague started their own business in countertop installation, which did well until \$70,000 worth of highly specialized tools were stolen from their work van one night. The financial stress on their business caused by the theft was not easily overcome, so their business ended. Dom then began assisting with his father's commercial textiles business, traveling across the USA and the world to inspect fabric orders.

From these diverse career experiences, Dom was emphatic about one lesson he has learned that influences his work as a Venturing crew advisor. "I learned about micromanaging other people... and how it is sometimes much easier to micromanage, but it is not necessarily good for the long run," he said. He described how he put effort into training his countertop installing assistants with his business, and then in turn asked his assistants to train the company's new hires. Dom said that he wants his Venturers to understand "how they can use their leadership position to help other people succeed" based on his personal experiences with both working for other people and owning his own business.

Helen

In all of my years participating in, observing, and discussing the programs of the BSA, Helen was the first person to use the word "subversive" to generally describe the skills she hopes her Venturers will learn from their time working with her in the crew. Before I am able to describe the subversion that Helen is attempting to teach to her Venturers, I should introduce her fully.

Helen came to the BSA as a parent accompanying her Cub Scout son. Her husband became the den leader, and she served on the pack committee. She continued with the pack committee for five years until her son became a Boy Scout, and then she became the troop committee's secretary, a role that officially lasted another eight years. However, one day Helen and some other leaders on the troop committee observed that the Scoutmaster of the troop was doing some things during a troop campout that appeared questionable. Helen did not want to make accusations about the Scoutmaster without having all of the relevant information, so she attended all of the trainings that a Scoutmaster would need to serve in that role. She never became a Scoutmaster or changed her role with the troop (and she had no dramatic confrontation with that Scoutmaster), but her training became a turning point for her involvement in the BSA—not only because she fully understood the expectations of a troop's top adult leader, but also because she came to value the training experience.

A few years later, she, her husband, and a Scouting colleague of theirs formed an Exploring post to complement the pack and troop that were already chartered to their church. She took on the role of the post committee chair, her husband became the post's associate advisor, and their daughter, other youth from the area, and eventually their son all joined the post. By this time, Helen's involvement in Scouting branched far beyond her post committee. She became a member of her council and district training committee, ultimately delivering training courses or sections of courses to hundreds of other volunteers, including delivering Wood Badge—the BSA's highest and most involved adult leader training. When the BSA launched Venturing in late 1998 the Exploring post converted into a Venturing crew. She also involved herself with the district and council Venturing committees that supported the growth of Venturing. With all of this involvement, something changed in Helen's leadership interests, and after 11 years of being a dedicated troop and crew committee member, and long after her children turned 21, she decided

to take on the role of crew advisor when she realized she had a replacement for herself as the crew committee chair.

Helen is dedicated to serving as a volunteer in the BSA and in her church. There was a time a few years back when she was working in retail sales in a large home repair store, where her schedule was irregular and unpredictable beyond a few weeks. She needed to scale back her Scouting involvement, along with her involvement in her church choir and church committees. These cuts in her volunteer life made her quite unhappy. She soon sought and found another job with a regular and predictable schedule and mostly free weekends in large part because she could resume her favorite volunteer activities.

Helen studied biology for her bachelor's degree, worked in an electronics lab, and then raised her young children for a few years working a variety of small jobs until the kids were in school. Then she became involved in cutting edge computer technology of the day and launched her own business with her husband's support. Their business took a major financial hit in the economic recession following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, which is what pushed her into the retail sales position mentioned earlier.

Helen is dedicated to her faith, her family, her community, and to the BSA. There is not much in her educational or professional background that would lead anyone to believe that she is a radical personality or some type of social revolutionary, yet this is how she describes herself. Helen is far from being a conspirator in a plot to overthrow any government or organization, but in addition to learning some personal management, leadership, and outdoor skills, she does hope that her Venturers will gain some skills in "subversion" as she calls it. According to Helen, her Venturers should learn how to think like their parents and other adults so that they can get what they want—and helping youth to think like adults is what she considers to be "subversive". As the crew advisor, Helen wants the parents and other adult leaders in her crew to develop the

Venturers' problem-solving abilities so that the youth will make well-reasoned choices independently, without being told what is and is not permissible.

Helen might have a science background, but the way she spoke led me to believe that she has informally and personally studied people for quite some time. She learned a lot from the retail sales experience she had at the home repair store, a job that gave her experience with people of all types. She has also refined her customer service skills with the technically specialized audiences she supported while she had her own business and while working at her current job in marketing and sales support with the multinational corporation. She distills the lessons she learned in those settings in a short and potent manner: "Do something wrong once, and you don't get to make that mistake again to that customer." In a sales environment, most people have come to expect some type of "subversive" tactics to ensure and maintain customer satisfaction. Helen, however spoke about the common thread within her professional and volunteer lives. "I've worked with [companies] to problem-solve, educate, and help them meet their own needs. There's a lot of that in Scouting with the youth. They come with a variety of world views and they're trying to fit into the world, and they're still kids, and they need help with their problem solving skills."

In addition to her experiences as a professional, Helen's experiences in her home and community have also influenced her Venturing crew advisement philosophy. She explicitly identified at separate times throughout our interviews two other points of wisdom that have been influential in her current beliefs about working: her experiences as a mother of two, and the other Scouting volunteers she has observed in the past. The three ongoing sources of experience in her life converge in her philosophy for advising the Venturers in her crew, because she is convinced that, "Helping them cope [with the world] is what it's all about."

Helen is very deliberate in her goals and strategies for success in the crew she advises. She prefers that no more than two or three adults be registered as crew advisors or associate advisors at one time, which allows her to limit how many adults are in the same room with the

Venturers at times when the crew is trying to plan and make decisions. She asks the extra adults to sit and work with the parent committee for her crew, while her crew committee chair explicitly assumes the role of being the go-between for the parents, the youth, and advisors of the crew. “It is hard for the parents to accept failure, and while I don’t want the Venturers to fail, I do want them to do things for themselves and deal with the positive or negative consequences on their own. In my experience, dealing with the consequences of their own actions is the only way kids learn responsibility,” she said, confidently, with an air of conviction.

Pam

Pam is an affectionate, caring, nurturing type of person. She is the type who has *her kids* that she gave birth to, and *her kids* that come from her community whom she practically raised. She longs to hear the successes of “her kids”. She pines over the shortcomings afflicting “her kids”. And she regularly thinks about “her kids”—be they from her blood, or not.

Pam grew up exposed to the BSA—her father and younger brother were quite active, and she tagged along with them to some Scouting events, including many weekends at their local council’s summer camp while the dad and brother were on staff. She truly enjoyed the outdoors, but the perspectives of the day and age when she was a teenager did not allow a young woman to serve on a Boy Scout summer camp’s staff, nor for her to join any BSA programs herself. Her involvement in the Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) program went only through the sixth grade, but according to her, it offered “next to nothing in the area of an outdoor experience”.

When her two sons were born, she was overjoyed at the opportunity to be involved with the BSA with them. They were each signed up as Cub Scouts from the earliest possible moment, and she was engaged with them through every Scouting experience they had, especially with outdoor activities that most mothers did not care to join—like the hikes and overnight camping

trips. That same level of engagement accompanied her sons into the Boy Scout program, and to this day she remains engaged in the BSA even though her sons have aged out of the Boy Scouts.

But Pam's volunteer time was not just with the BSA. From the time when her daughter was five years old, Pam also spent many years as the leader of her daughter's Girl Scout troop. It was her experience with the BSA, and her dissatisfaction with the older-girl programs of the GSUSA, that led her entire Girl Scout troop to cross-register as a Venturing crew with the BSA. For the past six years, the same core of girls has pursued program interests in both the Girl Scouts and in Venturing, operating on the BSA side as a female-only Venturing crew by the choice of the Venturers' themselves. Through the past 13 to 14 years, Pam, the crew of young women, and her co-leader, have grown to be a close-knit bunch. This closeness was formed through an active and collaborative pursuit of outdoor high adventure activities, leadership development, service to the community, personal growth projects, and moments of sharing before, during, and after each of their meetings.

Pam is a professional pastry chef with a broad culinary background, and she has leveraged her kitchen skills to launch her into the school classroom. She runs her own business supplementing elementary school curriculum by reinforcing math and science concepts with traveling hands-on and participatory cooking classes. Her business emerged from her formal education in science; she has a bachelor's degree in architecture and interior design, and graduate study in textile chemistry. She is not afraid to share her love of food, as my interviews with her yielded exquisite take-home baked goods for my household, and she capably explains the scientific principles behind the cooking and baking process when the topic emerges. She also described a number of instructional cooking activities that she and "her girls" had done in just the past few years—activities that seem simple after the fact, but required effort to set up. Through her desire to work with young people both personally and professionally, and quite possibly her

good-hearted maternal instincts, Pam has invested much effort in reading and learning about youth development even though her own children are grown and living elsewhere.

It would not be unfairly judgmental or awkward to consider Pam's advisement style to be parent-like, because parenting was at the core of her joining the BSA with her children. She elaborates:

The thing that gave me the greatest devotion to Scouting was that my father was not a very good father. At that time, most parents were not good parents—they read Dr. Spock, and they did what their parents did to them. When I saw my father working with boys at camp, I could see that he treated them differently than he treated his own children. Scouting helped to develop him in the same way that he helped to develop leadership in others. You couldn't pay me money or do anything to get me out of the program now. If you *get* the BSA program, and you can work [in the program as it was intended], it will change you. We don't ever stop growing as adults.

And to her point about being changed, when Pam is delivering BSA training programs to adult leaders, she likes to tell them “Grow with your Scouts, make the mistakes, have fun, make it be your fun, too.” Pam is firmly committed to the belief that the BSA's programs are just as much for the adults as they are for the youth, a point that is easy to understand in principle, and difficult to expect in practice within the BSA, as there is little in the BSA's adult leader training syllabi or program manuals that refer to the program's learning being a two-way path.

One example of the personal growth that Pam experienced while a Venturing crew advisor occurred while she was learning to successfully uphold one of the primary expectations of an advisor: the ability to be patient and allow the Venturers to have the autonomy they need to plan and implement their own activities. Advisors bear the responsibility for their crew's Venturers' health and safety, and they also want to make sure that the program is fun and engaging for them in order to maintain their interest in belonging to the crew. At the same time, advisors are the ones who must ensure that the crew's program, and the implementation of its activities, comes from the Venturers. She said, “I want to have a balance—I want to throw some energy into them, but not tell them exactly what to do. ...It is a challenge.” And speaking of the

challenges she faced in relation to learning the balance between guiding and motivating her crew's Venturers and giving them direct advice, she said, "It has not been second nature for me every step of the way. I've made mistakes."

If it appears that Pam struggles with the "balance" that she described despite her 17+ years working with youth, I think that she still does, because she is energetic, self-driven, and she wants her endeavors to be successful. Yet, when it comes to her Venturing crew, she is learning to accept that success comes less from what she herself does and more from how she reacts to the unpredictable situations involving her Venturers.

Ralph

Ralph has a personal love of outdoor high adventure, and he relishes the opportunity to share his knowledge and travels with the mature and motivated teenagers in Venturing. Ralph has engaged in adventurous outdoor pursuits since he began backpacking at age 17, and he has set an ambitious goal for himself: in his lifetime, Ralph wants to climb to the top of the highest point of each state in the USA. He has already checked 36 states off of his list.

Ralph was not a Scout as a youth, although his younger brother was involved and earned the Eagle Scout Award. Ralph's entrance into the BSA came when his wife returned home with their six-year-old son from a Cub Scout recruitment meeting and then told him that he was now a Tiger Cub group coach for about six Cub Scouts and their families. Ralph was involved as a group coach or den leader with his son throughout his years in Cub Scouting, and he became an assistant scoutmaster when his son became a Boy Scout. The height of the joint Scouting experience between Ralph and his son came from a weeklong canoe trek at the BSA's Northern Tier Canoe Base (in Ely, Minnesota), which still represents a cherished set of memories for the two. However, as Ralph's son grew into adolescence and grew tired of the "politics" among his

Scout peers in the Boy Scout troop, the son's enthusiasm for participating in Scouting became irregular and ultimately waned. Ralph, however, continued his involvement with the troop, particularly enjoying the outings and the outdoor skill instruction he facilitated with the Scouts, and the mentorship that he received from a close Scouting friend, another adult leader in the troop. One day that same close Scouting friend and mentor invited Ralph to help found a Venturing crew where Ralph could be an associate advisor and bring his love of outdoor adventures to a coed and older teen audience. But soon after the crew was formed, tragedy struck—Ralph's mentor was diagnosed with cancer, and he perished from the disease extremely quickly. Aside from the mourning and grieving for his personal friend, after a few months Ralph's Venturing crew's future became uncertain. The youth told the leaders that they wanted to continue their involvement with the crew as a way to honor their former leader, and Ralph made the choice to keep the crew going by assuming the role of crew advisor as an honor to his friend. At the time we met, Ralph was in his sixth year as the advisor to that crew, and he admits that had the youth not encouraged him and the other leaders to continue, he might have allowed the crew to fold soon after the sad loss of his mentor.

In his previous involvement with the BSA, Ralph preferred to serve as an assistant or a lower-level adult leader because those roles allowed him to stay focused on the aspects of the Scouting program that he enjoyed, particularly the outdoor activities and outdoor skills instruction. The sudden and untimely death of Ralph's mentor caused Ralph to assume some responsibilities that he was unsure whether he would enjoy, and unsure whether he could handle. He said, "One of my areas of discomfort was that I was not *raised* in Scouting and therefore did not know the *system*. Part of my growth was learning and feeling comfortable with this role [as the adult responsible for advising the crew]". But while sentiment may have prodded Ralph into the crew advisor role, it is identification that has caused Ralph to continue with it. "The crew is now a part of me," Ralph said. "[My mentor] is still there, but the crew is who I am, it's part of

my identity.” And when Ralph refers to “the crew”, he really means the crew, and not the BSA organization in general. Ralph has received plenty of offers and requests from other volunteers for him to assume other or additional leadership or committee roles within his local council, but save for one, the council’s high adventure committee, the other adult volunteer roles in the BSA do not interest him. He wants to go outdoors with the Venturers involved with the crew he advises.

Ralph is the vice president of a small company specializing in technical scientific instruments and analyses. He rose to his leadership role through his years within the company, after he started there as an entry level lab technician. He has taken a number of college courses in physics, computer science, and chemistry, “and maybe one day [he] will roll them together into a degree”, but to date his professional expertise has been primarily a product of on-the-job training, mentorship, and self study rather than from a formal college degree program. Ralph sees a parallel track of growth in his professional life, just like he experienced in Scouting:

Part of the reason I felt comfortable in taking over the crew was due to the growth through [my mentor’s] mentoring to me. My comfort with my skills gave me a base to take on the challenges in becoming the crew advisor. The same has been true in my workplace, where the years of mentoring under the company president has given me the confidence to take on areas within the company that I did not train for. Following those precedents, I now see that my role is to be the mentor to both the youth in the crew as well as to the employees at my workplace.

Likewise, Ralph feels that his roots in the technical scientific services industry also provide him with useful skills that help him with his crew advisement—in fact, he believes that the relationship between his professional leadership duties and his volunteer crew advisement responsibilities are “symbiotic”, where the skills required for each of those roles in his life tend to “cross over”. In fact, Scouting helps him pursue an interest he could not do professionally:

The science background in me brings curiosity. I like to turn rocks over. I like to talk about the stars. There’s a part of me that always wanted to be a teacher. I don’t think I could have handled the bureaucracy of teaching, but this allows me to be a teacher within my own comfort zone. I control my level of involvement. I

can focus on the things that I'm comfortable with focusing on. It's a life experience.

I found an interesting dichotomy in Ralph. He has an ambitious personality where he seeks and accomplishes personal challenges in the outdoors, but he does not allow the adventure-seeking drive of his personality to interfere with the activity and trip planning made by the Venturers in the crew. The only standard he hopes to maintain with the crew's program is that they continue to regularly pursue adventurous outdoor activities. However, outdoor activities do not need to be the only activities they need to pursue. For example, the crew he advises recently went on a weekend backpacking trip, an evening miniature golf and ice cream outing, an afternoon at the local indoor pistol shooting range, and a weeklong bike trip. Those activity ideas, and the plans for making those activities happen, all arose from the Venturers. Ralph sometimes tells the Venturers that he is, "just the lowly advisor. What we do [as a crew activity] is up to you." As a crew advisor, he says his role is to, "Help them develop a goal, and then help them develop the steps to achieve that goal." But Ralph admits that for activity planning with Venturers, "Failure sometimes is going to happen... and sometimes things **don't** happen." Indeed, my conversation with Ralph touched upon unsuccessful crew activities as much as the successful ones. These unsuccessful activities included their evening mini golf outing, which attracted four participants out of 15, and during their weekend cycling trip that resulted in some of the participants arriving without knowing that they needed to bring their own bikes.

Despite Ralph's ambition and his expedition planning experience, weak or failed activities with the crew do not bruise his enthusiasm. One reason for this is his ongoing personal travels apart from the crew where he continues to go on outdoor adventures to his desired destinations on his own or with his close friends. That is, the crew does not represent his only opportunities to get outdoors. But there is a second reason that helps him avoid becoming frustrated. As Ralph says, "There's a paternal part to [watching activities fall apart]. These are

kids I'm watching grow. I want to give them skills, and help them become leaders. That's my job—except it's not a job."

Wally

I selected Wally to be a potential study participant without outside assistance a few months after first meeting him at a weekend Venturing event. Then, later in my study Wally was actually recommended to me by a third party with in-depth knowledge about Venturing in Wally's local council. This was the only case in this study where a selection I made on my own was coincidentally reaffirmed at a later time, and for the record I should say that the coincidental recommendation came without Wally's name or any hint of him emerging from me or the other person prior to the recommendation.

Wally recently retired from a 25-year career as a Presbyterian youth minister, a career he prepared for by enrolling in a psychology and English dual-major as a college student, and pursuing a specialty in youth ministry for his masters in divinity degree during his time in the seminary. The majority of his experience in advising youth came from his work in youth ministry at four or five churches in the Midwestern USA, but he credits much of his advisement style with (Venturing age) young adults to three experiences he had as a youth. One experience occurred after Wally was a Boy Scout for two years, and when his family relocated to a new state for his father's job. He tried to join a troop that was led by a group of stern adults who made him feel quite unwelcome. Primarily, they would not accept any of the rank and badge advancements Wally hoped to transfer into their troop. As a result, Wally lost interest in belonging to a Boy Scout troop. Wally did not rejoin the BSA until his own children joined years later. Second, during his childhood the Presbyterian Church of the USA formed the Westminster Youth Fellowship (WYF) as its national youth ministry program. Wally explained that the guiding

philosophy of the WYF was to provide youth with shared governance and autonomy within the church. In hindsight, he noted that the WYF where he was an officer as a high school student was run almost exactly like a contemporary Venturing crew. Wally's third experience as a youth that shaped his advisement style was his family's transitoriness; prior to graduating high school, Wally had relocated 16 times. When I asked Wally what experience in his background helped to shape his Venturing crew advisement style, he said that all of the moving around taught him "how to make a network for [him]self".

Wally is the father of two Eagle Scout sons, and Scouting was a full-family engagement with his (now former) wife when their two boys were younger. Wally's younger son belonged for a few years to a Venturing crew that Wally had started at his church soon after the BSA introduced Venturing in 1998. He has served in a number of volunteer roles within the BSA throughout his career, including service within Cub Scout packs and Boy Scout troops and leadership roles at the district and council levels. Most relevant to this research, Wally has served as a Venturing crew advisor for a total of eight years in two crews, the top-most Venturing leader (the committee chairman) at the district, council, and area levels, and as a trainer of Venturing crew advisors. Also, he has served as a staff member and director of a Powder Horn Course.

One telling observation that I made about Wally is that he seems to spend a lot of time thinking about the Venturers he works with, including both the crew's program and the individual needs of the members. Through this reflection, he developed an approach to working with each of them that he intends to carry through. For example, he understands that three of the methods of Venturing according to the VLST syllabus (Boy Scouts of America, 1998b) are Leadership, Group Activities, and High Adventure. At one time during his advisor tenure he and his crew went an entire year without doing a group activity beyond a typical biweekly meeting because none of the Venturers stepped-up to plan any type of activity. Wally said to them, "If you plan it, we'll go. But I'm not planning anything." Eventually, the mix of youth members in his crew

changed slightly, and some of the newer people began planning outings and activities again. But during the yearlong lull in the adventurous activities, he had a number of debates with parents and Venturers about the reasons why the crew was not doing any activities except for meetings. Wally held firm to his position that he was not planning anything for the Venturers.

Wally also said that from his experience as a youth minister, he also learned the importance of keeping his rules simple, so that the teenagers would not have any rules to break. He began discussing this topic with me by stating that “most other advisors would be appalled at my crew’s bylaws, because there’s only three simple rules”, and he continued to tell me that (1) he “plans on having fun with the crew” and if he “needs to keep someone on a short leash, then that person won’t be allowed to go onto crew activities”; (2) “there’s blue tents, there’s pink tents, and there will be no purple tents”, referring to his stance that males and females will not cohabitate (nor will they engage in any physical contact) during crew events; and (3) young men who are also still Boy Scouts but not yet Eagle Scouts must continue to earn two Boy Scout merit badges every six months in order to remain in good standing with the crew, and to prevent trouble between the crew and the boy’s troop. While I hear an air of strong personal opinion in Wally’s “rules”, I can see that he is thinking a lot about what he feels is important for the youth in his charge. Although Wally has these strong opinions, he is still dedicated to doing what he believes to be best for the youth. He described his intentions when he said, “Some people don’t like the idea of an advisor being a friend.... I want to be a friend to the Venturers, someone they know they can come talk to, to help them consider the choices they have in their lives.”

I feel as though Wally’s perspective is built from a blend of his deeply rooted knowledge of the Venturing program and of the Boy Scouts of America, and his academic study of, and career experience with facilitating the conceptual development of young people. Wally appears to have a substantial amount of training and education that is directly applicable to the tasks, decisions, and perspectives of advising Venturers of a crew. Because of his education and

experience, Wally is often thinking about the long-term benefits that his Venturers could gain if they learned the lessons that Venturing was offering to them. It seems to me that Wally turned his gaze as an advisor of youth toward the future; a future they may not yet understand.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, data analysis began with a review and transcription of the recordings into digital text. Once the fifteen interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed and coded. The coding process began simply, where I read each of the interviews looking for information that appeared at my first glance to be related to one or more of the research questions discussed in Chapter 3. For example, I printed all of the transcription documents, assigned one highlighter (marker) color to each question, and highlighted passages in the transcriptions in the color corresponding to the relevant research question. Once the passages that could inform my responses to the research questions were identified, the passages were reviewed, compared, contrasted, sorted, and labeled across a number of repeating cycles. The goal of the analysis was to create themes that could inform my response to each of the research questions so that sentiment and perspective that was common across some or all of the participants could be labeled and described as concisely as possible. The process of generating these themes helped me determine what statements were the opinions of individual participants as opposed to concepts that could represent a more generalized view of Venturing crew advisors in the BSA.

The following figures help illustrate the data analysis process as I conducted it after reviewing the recordings and transcripts of the interviews. Figure 4-1 shows an excerpt from a list I created of statements (paraphrased or directly quoted) made by the participants. At first, the statements simply relate to the first research question of the study. No organization or categorization scheme had yet been generated by me to aid my interpretation of the data.

| | |
|-----|---|
| ▼ □ | What perceptions do Venturing BSA crew advisors have about their own capabilities for facilitating the positive development of the Venturers within their crews? |
| □ | Dom has attended every BSA training available --> Training = Preparation or capability [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 2] |
| □ | Being trained affords independence [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 2] |
| ▼ □ | Being trained assures safety of kids [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 3] |
| □ | Assuring the safety of the youth is the first priority for advisors [Ralph, Interview 2, page 4] |
| □ | Being trained assures that if an activity is falling apart, another leader can step in and take over without missing a beat [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 3] |
| ▼ □ | Age of the advisor is both positive and negative characteristic [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 3-4] |
| □ | A younger advisor can relate to youth better than an older advisor [Dom, Interview 2, page 1] |
| □ | An advisor is more of an older brother than a parent [Dom, Interview 2, page 1] |
| □ | There's a parental or nurturing component to being a crew advisor [Ralph, Interview 1 (Profile), page 5] [Pam, Interview 1 (Profile), page 1] |
| □ | An advisor should be a friend to the youth—someone the youth can come talk to, to help them consider choices they have in their lives [Wally, Interview 1 (Profile), page 3] [Wally, Interview 1, page 5] |
| □ | Dom wants youth to know they are cared for, and to know the consequences of their decisions, such as how their decision to not attend a meeting affects the whole crew because other count on them [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 4] |
| □ | As the youth grow and mature, so does their crew advisor [Dom, Interview 2, page 1] |
| □ | Micromanaging others is not good for their long-term development or capacity [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 5] |
| □ | Dom wants them to learn how their leadership should be used to help other people succeed [Dom, Interview 1 (Profile), page 5] |
| □ | Program advancement as an escalator, and not an elevator, because with an escalator everyone is moving up at the same time, and there's always room for more people to ride [Dom, Interview 1, page 4] |
| □ | Value of BARS from BSA training (belonging, awards, recognition, service) [Dom, Interview 1, page 1] |

Figure 4-1: Screen capture from an early phase of the data analysis process.

Throughout the analysis my intent was to categorize and organize the participants' statements into themes that represent the perceptions and perspectives of the participants. These themes would then help me present a cogent response to each of the research questions. Figure 4-2 illustrates an intermediate phase from the data analysis process, where themes were beginning to emerge. At the point of the analysis captured in this figure, not only were there initial attempts to label the themes (e.g. What the Advisor is to Youth), but also the sentiment of participants' statements were clarified. For example, similar sentiments from multiple participants were combined and refined to help me develop a clear understanding of the concepts that were shared across each participant's unique experience (e.g. Youth trust advisors because of their ability to be non-judgmental, or just listen [sixth bullet down]).

| Advisors' Responses | Category |
|---|-----------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What perceptions do Venturing BSA crew advisors have about their own capabilities for facilitating the positive development of the Venturers within their crews? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What the Advisor is to Youth | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An advisor should be a friend to the youth—someone the youth can come talk to, to help them consider choices they have in their lives [Wally, Interview 1 (Profile), page 3] [Wally, Interview 1, page 5] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisor avoids holding failures, mistakes, problems, arguments of/by/with the youth over their heads [Dom, Interview 2, page 3] [Dom, Interview 2, page 4] [Ralph, Interview 2, page 3] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth approach advisors about personal, non-Venturing issues, that the youth may or may not discuss with their parents [Dom, Interview 2, page 5] [Helen, Interview 2, page 4] [Pam, Interview 1, page 8] [Ralph, Interview 2, page 8] [Wally, Interview 2, page 3] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth trust advisors because of their ability to be non-judgmental, or to just listen [Dom, Interview 2, page 5] [Helen, Interview 2, page 4] [Pam, Interview 1, page 8] [Ralph, Interview 2, page 8] [Wally, Interview 2, page 3] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust develops between youth and advisors when youth know that an adult cares specifically about them [Dom, Interview 3, page 2] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The personal decisions that youth need to make, that they discuss with their advisors, may not be life-altering in the grand scheme of the world, but they are life-altering to that youth at that time [Helen, Interview 2, page 4] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisors can be influential in important life-choices of the youth [Dom, Interview 3, page 2] | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patience is an important quality for crew advisors to possess [Helen, Interview 1, page 4] [Pam, Interview 1 (Profile), page 3] [Pam, Interview 1, page 7] | A is to Y |

Figure 4-2: Screen capture from an intermediate phase of the data analysis process.

Figure 4-3 presents an excerpt of the near-final phase of the analysis just prior to composing the findings chapters (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) of this report. During this phase I refined the wording used to describe the themes, perceptions, and statements from the interviews with the participants, and I selected and ordered the best examples and quotations (where applicable) that would represent the themes I described in this report. By the end of the analysis the outline of themes and subthemes had taken form, which allowed me to begin the process of writing a narrative of those findings as a response to the research questions that framed this research.

| Advisors' Responses | | Category |
|---|--|-----------|
| What perceptions do Venturing BSA crew advisors have about crew advisors' capabilities for facilitating the positive development of the Venturers within their crews? | | |
| Capability to Build Productive Interpersonal Relationships with Youth Be sure to answer why I'm discussing relationships when talking about capabilities Use metaphor about the advisor is | | |
| Trustworthy | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth seek relationships with adults although they may not know what they need from a relationship with an adult [Wally, Interview 1, page 5] [Wally, Interview 2, page 5] | | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisors are role models for their youth [Pam, Interview 1, page 6] | | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisor avoids holding failures, mistakes, problems, arguments of/by/with the youth over their heads [Dom, Interview 2, page 3] [Dom, Interview 2, page 4] [Ralph, Interview 2, page 3] | | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisors are cheerleaders who offer encouragement [Pam, Interview 1, page 8] | | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth approach advisors about personal, non-Venturing issues, that the youth may or may not discuss with their parents [Dom, Interview 2, page 5] [Helen, Interview 2, page 4] [Pam, Interview 1, page 8] [Ralph, Interview 2, page 8] [Wally, Interview 2, page 3] | | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth trust advisors because of their ability to be non-judgmental, or to just listen [Dom, Interview 2, page 5] [Helen, Interview 2, page 4] [Pam, Interview 1, page 8] [Ralph, Interview 2, page 8] [Wally, Interview 2, page 3] | | A is to Y |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust develops between youth and advisors when youth know that an adult cares specifically about them [Dom, Interview 3, page 2] | | A is to Y |

Figure 4-3: Screen capture from a near-final phase of the data analysis process.

The data analysis process that I implemented for this research was influenced by and adapted from the works of two authors. Moustakas (1994) described a procedure of “horizontalizing the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value” (p. 118). After horizontalizing the data, researchers are recommended to list the “meaning units” (p. 118) and then cluster those into common categories or themes. The themes then support the development of descriptions of the research participants’ experiences. Dey (1993) describes a qualitative data analysis process that begins with “reading and annotating” (p. 83) and continues with: creating categories based on the data, assigning data to categories, splitting and splicing data bits, linking bits of data together within the categories, and making connections among the themes. Dey’s analysis process was designed to support the production of the researcher’s account of the phenomena being studied. Together, the analysis methods recommended by Moustakas and Dey helped me design and implement a process to look

more deeply into the participants' perspectives and develop a set of themes that fit within the context of the Venturing program and the intentions of this research.

The purpose of the following chapters of this research report was to provide the best examples to illustrate the identified themes that would allow me to construct a personalized response to the research questions. Quotations from the participant interviews were integrated into the document's narrative in a way that colorized the reporting of the findings and preserved the flow of the presentation. Readers will note that brackets ([]) indicate slight modifications to the participant's spoken words inserted by me to preserve the quotation's readability and to clarify the participant's intended meaning. Since people tend to speak differently from how they write, and face-to-face conversation often conveys contextual details using nonverbal clues, some quotations would be confusing to read without slight revision. Grammatical pronouns like *they*, *their*, *his*, *her*, *he*, *she*, and *it* represented one particular concern that was routinely revised in the participant quotations presented herein.

Researcher Trustworthiness and Research Credibility

As the researcher for a qualitative research study, I represent the medium through which the perspectives of the study participants must pass. My responsibility as the author is to convey the participants' sentiments accurately, and to compile their messages in a way that tells a meaningful story in response to the research questions driving the inquiry of this study. However, my own perspectives are always at play with this type of research, and while my personal influence cannot be eliminated, strategies can be implemented to provide for the reader's sense of trust regarding the analysis and the findings, and to preserve the credibility of the research.

Maxwell (1992) suggested a typology of five aspects of validity that are pertinent to qualitative research. According to Maxwell, this typology is "useful both as a checklist of the

kinds of threats to validity that one needs to consider as a framework for thinking about the nature of these threats and the possible ways that specific threats might be addressed” (p. 296; emphasis in the original). While Maxwell insisted that researchers “cannot use the typology presented here to eliminate, directly and mechanically, particular threats to the validity of their accounts” (p. 296), the five aspects of validity that he presented have guided me throughout the implementation, analysis, and reporting of this research. The remainder of this section will describe each of the five aspects of validity presented by Maxwell and address the methods that I implemented throughout this research to address each of the aspects.

Descriptive validity in Maxwell’s typology is the factual accuracy of the researcher’s account of what was observed in the research setting. This aspect of validity targets the researcher’s trustworthiness—as in whether or not the researcher chose to report truthful or false descriptions of statements made the research participants’ interviews, for example. Descriptive validity refers to issues of both primary and secondary interpretation, where primary descriptive validity describes the researcher’s account of what s/he observed directly, and secondary descriptive validity describes accounts of what could have been in principle observed by the researcher but were inferred from other data—such as the accounts of the research participants or interpretation of documents and other data sources.

The methods that I utilized to collect, confirm, and analyze the perspectives of the participants represent the core of the factual accuracy of the findings reported in this document. The three-interview series (Seidman, 2006) method for data collection provided an opportunity to develop a relationship with each participant by learning about her/his background and experiences relevant to the research, and then having ample opportunity to question and clarify pertinent topics presented in a previous interview during the successive interview. Since all of the interviews were digitally recorded, I had the ability to review each interview—or even each participant statement—as many times as was necessary to help me understand both the words that

were spoken and the meanings imbued within them. Each of the participants were also provided with an opportunity to review and revise the profiles that I wrote about their background experience and personal characteristics that defined the lens through which each of them was viewed by me, and by extension, by the readers of this document. These methods supported the primary descriptive validity of what I directly observed and experienced during my time with each participant.

Three additional sources of information also supported the descriptive validity of this research in general, and particularly the secondary descriptive validity of the information that I received from the participants but could not observe on my own. First, my personal experience in the BSA, including five years of experience with supporting the Venturing program, allowed me the ability to continually analyze and assess the dialogue I had with the participants. If a participant said something that seemed extraordinary in comparison with my personal experiences, I was able to probe and question those statements. By resolving their experiences with my own, I could make sense of their responses to the interview questions and thus identify how each participant's perspectives were similar to or different from those of other participants. The plausibility of each of the participants' accounts, however, was not assessed only by me. I sought the assistance of a *critical friend* (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) who also had extensive experience in the BSA and the Venturing program—in fact, the critical friend provided for important experience that I lacked, as I have never been a crew advisor while he has served in that role for over five years. The critical friend and I discussed the findings of this study as I reported them to ensure that I properly interpreted the participants' statements from a crew advisor's perspective. And lastly, both the critical friend and I relied on the publications and documents of the BSA and the Venturing program to assess the alignment of the participants' statements and my analysis with the purposes and intents of the program.

The second aspect of validity in qualitative research described by Maxwell (1992) was interpretive validity, referring to the researcher's proper representation of "what the observed objects, events, behaviors mean to the people engaged in and with them" (p. 288). In the case of this research, interpretive validity refers to the connections that I report among the words spoken to me by the participants and the meanings that I perceive behind their statements so that I am not only making sense of the participants' accounts from my own standing but also from the participants' point-of-view. My efforts to represent the participants' accounts in their own terms, and not just my own, are what allow this research to be a nonfiction analysis and interpretation of the experiences of crew advisors and not just an editorial or a work of fiction.

The methods employed for assuring the factual accuracy of my presentation of the participants' accounts also contributed to the interpretive validity within this research (and will be the case in the other aspects of validity presented hence). The focus and duration of the contact with each participant during three-interview series helped me to understand the values and perspectives that represent each individual's worldview, or at least each worldview as far as crew advisement in the Venturing program is concerned. My personal experience in the Venturing program also supported interpretive validity by helping me focus on what was important and meaningful within the approximately 4.5 hours of recorded dialogue I had with each participant. These selections were made by me but were affirmed by the critical friend whose past experience helped reassure me that my analysis and findings were plausible within the context of the program and the crew advisor role. Overall, throughout the analysis, there was a conscious effort made by me to represent the participant's perspectives with factual accuracy and with an interpretation that created viable and valid themes that emerged from the information that they provided.

Theoretical validity, the third aspect of validity for qualitative research in Maxwell's typology, applied only loosely to this research, as the goal of this study was not to develop a

theory but to report participants' perspectives and develop a suggested model for addressing a training problem. Maxwell saw this aspect of validity as the concepts used by a researcher to build a theory and the relationships that a researcher believes to exist among those concepts. If we consider the interpretation and application of the findings of this study to be the "theory" in Maxwell's terms, this aspect of validity was relevant to this research.

In addition to the research methods described above, theoretical validity was also addressed through the brief comparisons of the BSA's adult volunteer training methods with those of other youth organizations. Through the interviews with the administrators of adult volunteer training in the GSUSA and 4-H, and reviews of training documents from those same organizations, I was able to suggest an application of the findings in the form of a training program that would meet the needs of the BSA (according to the aims and mission) and would be in line with the types of training methods and content utilized by other youth development organizations. Thus, the comparison and contrast with other organizations helped demonstrate that the potential application suggested herein was not far fetched, and was indeed plausible.

Maxwell's (1992) fourth aspect of validity in qualitative research is generalizability, which he described as "the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons, times, or settings than those directly studied" (p. 293). Maxwell continued by identifying two particular stances of generalizability within qualitative research, that which is internal or external. Internal generalizability refers to "generalizing within the community, group, or institution studied to persons, events, and settings that were not directly observed or interviewed" (p. 293) and would be in this research the generalizability of the particular crew advisors who were interviewed to other crew advisors in the Venturing program who were not interviewed. External generalizability, on the other hand, refers to generalizations made to other communities, groups, or institutions, such as the generalization of this study's

findings about the training of adult volunteers in the Venturing program to the training of adult volunteers in other youth development organizations.

Earlier, in Chapter 4, I presented details about participant selection and sampling, both of which relate directly to the limitations and possibilities for generalization from the crew advisors I interviewed to the general population of crew advisors in the BSA. By targeting “relatively successful” Venturing crew advisors I ultimately limited the opportunities for generalization to other crew advisors in the BSA who delivered the Venturing program with similar degrees of success. However, these criteria also served to define the population I was researching, given that I wanted to study people who were delivering the Venturing program as the BSA intended it to be delivered, thereby making comparison crew advisors more easily identifiable. In other words, it would be more difficult to attempt to compare crew advisors who delivered the Venturing program in ways that did not match the intentions of the BSA than it would be to compare those who were delivering the program as intended. I also presented in Chapter 4 the method I used to maximally vary the perspectives that were analyzed in this research. By focusing the analysis on five participants described throughout this report and not all of the original ten participants, I was able to focus on the broadest array of crew advisor perspectives that I had available. Thus, the combination of relatively successful crew advisor selection with the maximally varied sample methods allowed me to look across a sample of crew advisors with diverse perspectives who were comparable in their implementation and delivery of the Venturing program. The findings that emerge from the analysis of the perspectives contained within this sample would then carry a caveat that they could only be internally generalizable to other crew advisors who were relatively successful by comparison.

The external generalizability of the findings of this research were previously discussed in Chapter 3 of this document, so I will simply recap here within Maxwell’s framework. While this research focused on participants involved with only the BSA’s Venturing program, I argued that

the findings of this study could be applied to other youth development organizations because (1) the characteristics of the general pool of youth members and adult volunteers from where any youth development organization would recruit are the same, and (2) as long as the other organizations had a positive youth development focus, then the knowledge and skills necessary for facilitating the personal growth and development of the youth members would be the same, and the only differences between the organizations would be their organization-specific activities and administration methods. Thus, the design of this research allows for its findings to be generalizable outside of the Venturing program of the BSA, but only in instances where the comparison program utilizes adult volunteers from the general population and has a program aim of facilitating positive youth development.

The final aspect of validity presented by Maxwell's typology is evaluative validity, which "involves the application of an evaluative framework to the objects of the study, rather than a descriptive, interpretive, or explanatory one" (p. 295). Two key points raised by Maxwell that are related to evaluation in qualitative research are that evaluations must be based "on the particular description, interpretation, or theory one constructs" (p. 295), and that many qualitative researchers make no claims to evaluate what they study. However, given that this research is presented here as a scholarly personal narrative (Nash, 2004) written from my personal perspective, evaluation is not entirely avoided throughout this document. As Nash writes, "Truth and reality are infinitely interpretable. So, too, is the notion of 'validity.' Everything is up for grabs. There is no final word on anything..." (p. 41). The evaluative statements that readers will encounter are presented as a representation of my perspectives as the researcher and decision-maker for what is presented in this document, providing readers with insight regarding what I included or excluded in the document, and what I value or do not value. I have attempted to avoid judgment about information presented to me by the participants' through their own recollection, and not through my own direct observation. But as you read in the previously presented profiles

of the participants, the time that I spent interviewing them allowed me the opportunity to see their personalities and demeanors—characteristics that came from my own observation. Thus, any evaluative statements in this document should be a representation of my personal and direct experience.

Overall, the potential for readers to consider me trustworthy as a researcher and my research to be a credible contribution to scholarship are the direct results of two frameworks that guided my actions: the values I hold as a researcher, and the methods employed in my research. In terms of my values as a researcher, I made the choice from the outset to make trustworthiness and credibility goals of this research project, and this choice comes from my education and background in research and scholarship. From this initial choice I selected and implemented research methods that helped me address concerns about the validity of the findings of this research as were outlined by Maxwell's typology above. The designs of the data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the findings were robust insofar that those methods helped address multiple aspects of validity in Maxwell's typology (i.e. the three-interview series and the critical friend review addressed the descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity of the study, and a case could be made for how those methods supported the other aspects of validity in the typology). The choice to implement these research methods from very beginning of the project have support my attempts at trustworthiness and credibility, and while the final judgment belongs to each individual reader, I have confidence that I have done my best in this regard.

Why Bother?

To this point in the report, you have learned about my background, the theoretical basis for this research study, the questions that this study sought to explore, and the methods by which

information was gathered and credibility upheld. The final setup detail that remains is the answer to the simple question, “Why bother?”

There are plenty of topics worth researching, and the Boy Scouts of America is not that big of a deal in that the organization does not receive any federal or state funding like the 4-H programs, it does not target underserved children, nor is its direct mission dedicated to overcoming societal ills like poverty, prejudice, or substance abuse. Perhaps a good reason why so little scholarly work is dedicated to the BSA’s program is because in the eyes of United States society the value of the BSA is dubious at best. But as you read earlier, and as you will read next, I am fond of the organization and its programs, not out of blind adulation fueled by warm memories, but because the content of the program is meaningful for youth of all ages and generations. At issue are simple tweaks to the delivery of the programs, whereby revising the preparation of single type of role within the organization, the Venturing crew advisor, could have the potential to align the entire organization’s strategy with contemporary scholarship of youth development, instructional design, and education.

The research methods summarized in this chapter provide the leverage to turn a personal hobby into a unique contribution to institutions focused on youth development by structuring the research process in a way that makes it meaningful to others. In the following chapter, I will describe my aspirations for the BSA and its important stakeholders. These aspirations will influence the recommendations that I make based on the research findings. In essence, the components of this report not only establish a chain of personal reasoning for the research study, but they lay the foundation for the pursuit of deeper understanding through the future research endeavors that will result from this project.

Chapter 5

The Influence of My Aspirations

Some people focus on fine detail, some focus on the “big picture.” I appreciate detail, and I try to be a good manager and leader of groups who need to attend to those details, but really, the natural space for my thoughts is on the macro level. I like to generate vision, to rally partners and collaborators to my vision, and to be the steward of the process that works toward achieving the vision. I do not yet feel that I have approached an arguable mastery of such visionary leadership abilities, but I have experienced some successes, and my volunteer leadership efforts with the Boy Scouts of America have provided the biggest challenges and a veritable proving ground for my mettle. I am convinced that anyone who can coordinate and ultimately drive any substantive change through the BSA organization at any level, local through national, given the size of the organization and hierarchy that has become traditionally inherent in the administrative model it employs, has extraordinary leadership skill. The characteristics of the organization and the people who lead it change slowly, almost generationally, meaning that substantive change to the organization’s formally declared mission and vision requires an almost cosmic convergence of factors. For this reason, I make no foolhardy attempts to establish goals for the BSA’s programs, especially for the Venturing program, based on the findings of research like mine and related research conducted by others who strive to deliver the best possible growth experiences for adolescents. When it comes to the practical application of research findings in the BSA’s program design and program delivery methods, I am left with only my aspirations for the program’s future and the potential to influence it in the future.

Prior to describing the findings of my research for this current project, the readership would benefit from a relatively clear summary of my aspirations for the Boy Scouts of America,

the Venturing program in particular, and my role and contributions to the organization, the program, and to older adolescents in general. These aspirations provide what could be considered the biggest clues about the “lens” through which I interpret and make personal meaning from the participants’ responses to the interview questions that were the primary method of data collection in the research study reported herein. In fact, I believe that my aspirations have more of an influence upon my lens of interpretation than does my educational background and research training. Quite simply, I attribute my interest in pursuing my education and research training to my positive experiences in Scouting as a youth and young adult, and my aspirations to improve that experience for others. What follows are four categories for my aspirations for the organization, the program, and the individuals who support the organization and program.

Aspirations for Improving the BSA and the Venturing Program

After a few years of reading, dialogue with others, research, and thought, my greatest aspiration for the Boy Scouts of America and all of its programs, and particularly the Venturing program that serves coed older adolescents is for the organization to truly embrace its potential as a national program network that intends to facilitate the positive development of youth rather than maintaining its position as a collection of local clubs that deliver entertaining activities to its membership. The lack of true embrace for the positive development of youth by the BSA is evident in the content of the training curricula for adult volunteers with the organization. To date, the volunteers represent the primary means of delivering the programs to the youth members, and the training curricula focuses not on helping adults understand the organization’s only meaningful audience (youth), but on mitigating liability for the organization as a whole. While I surely support the notion that the health and safety of the youth members is tantamount to all other concerns, safety is a mindset, not a means to an end, especially when the ultimate “end” for the

organization is its vision to “prepare every eligible youth in America to become a responsible, participating citizen and leader” (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b).

Briefly outlining the methods by which the BSA could modify its operations in order to truly embrace its positive youth development possibilities is a challenge and not practical to propose within a report like this one. But the modifications start with implementing an administrative philosophy that values total quantities of membership to a lesser degree and the impact made upon and by its members to a greater degree.⁴ One strategy for appealing to the parents of youth is emphasizing the safety of their children while they participate in BSA programs. One method for ensuring that safety is focusing much of the basic and continuing training programs of the volunteer adult leaders on maintaining a safe context for Scouting activities. I interpret the protection of the safety and well-being of youth when they are in the care of the organization to be a basic right and expectation within our society. While adult volunteer training should educate its trainees of the laws and policies protecting the youth, the repeated drilling of the laws and policies dampens the adult volunteers’ sensitivity to the actual programmatic needs and wants of the youth. By dulling the adults’ sensitivity to the youths’ interests, the organization loses touch with its base—the very membership that is the reason for, and the financial backing of, the organization’s existence.

The second limitation that hobbles the organization’s fulfillment of its full value to society as a youth development organization is the abstract, complex, and downright fuzzy nature of adolescent growth and maturation. The current set of adult volunteer trainings for crew advisors and other leaders in the BSA demonstrate how much easier it is to train volunteers on well-bounded topics of safety and accident prevention than it would be to provide trainees with ongoing exposure to the dynamics involved with working with youth at various stages of human development. Also a challenge to the current training structure is working with the parents of youth along with other adults and working with the ideas for fun activities and an overall

meaningful program that keep them all coming back for more. Improving the place of young people within our society is not easy, and that is why it needs to be done. Working with youth who are able to choose whether they participate in the program or not is, in itself, the very reason why an oversimplified approach to volunteer training works against the BSA's ability to become an organization that provides youth development, and not just a youth program. The network that is the BSA does not work in concordance with the nature of human development, instead the organization is practically in competition with it.

Of course, successful youth programs that facilitate the positive development of youth should keep those youth safe, but they typically target so much more. Youth development programs are not merely babysitting services; they strengthen the hearts and minds of the next generation of citizens. The Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents* are a key indicator of this concept, as safety concerns represent a minority of the 40 Assets outlined as important factors that contribute to positive development and ultimately correlate with each young person's growth into a contributing role to their society. The 40 Assets, which have been integrated as program design guideposts into youth programs across the USA, particularly the programs of the Girl Scouts of the USA (Schoenberg & Riggins, 2003), are virtually absent from the design of the BSA's programs, and especially the Venturing program. A review of the youth who stuck with the BSA's programs will reveal that the developmental assets are visible in the practical outcomes of the BSA programs. However, the Assets are present only by coincidence, and not by design.

So for the BSA to truly embrace its prospects as a positive youth development organization, it can first start with an upgrade to the sophistication and the intentionality of its training programs, targeting at first an identification of what Developmental Assets are addressed by each of the organization's programs, and then using that initial information to revise its programs. In this revision process, the organization could seek to extend its capacity by targeting

additional assets that are practical for the programs to achieve, and becoming aware of which of the assets the organization's programs are not able to address. This foundational analysis only scratches the surface of the body of information that the organization would need for revising its programs to focus on youth development, but it does provide a start by identifying to varying degrees what successful crew advisors already know, what they need to know, and what they are willing to learn.

Aspirations for Venturing Crew Advisors

We cannot hope for the adult volunteers who accept volunteer roles as Venturing crew advisors to arrive to the job with a solid educational or practical background in youth development. Such an expectation would be a detriment to the program for many reasons, with relevance to the local community and its families being one of the largest of them. We need all types of adult volunteers to support all types of youth and families. However, if we aspire for the organization to embrace its potential for facilitating positive development in youth, Venturing crew advisors will also need a toolbox of strategies and tactics that prepare them to address the needs of older adolescent coeds as these young people experience one of the most turbid times of change in their lives. Granted, some advisors do arrive to the crew advisor role with a substantial toolbox for working with young people, and still others continue to seek out and add more tools to their toolbox out of their own personal interests. Thus, to truly improve the experience of the Venturers in terms of positive development, we must aspire to not allow the success of each Venturing crew advisor to be left to chance. To overcome chance and make the crews of our adult volunteers successful by design, we must develop a training program or sequence of training experiences that increase the probability that an optimal positive development experience can be facilitated by the advisors of every Venturing crew and Venturer in the organization.

Work toward this aspiration would require a systemic shift in the meaning of training, and even volunteering for that matter. It would start with engendering a commitment from each of the volunteers to strive to better themselves while they continue to dedicate their energies to better the youth whom they advise. This presents a challenging opportunity for the organization: on one hand we have the fact that serving as a crew advisor is a volunteer “duty”, requiring energy above and beyond the level required of each of those people to perform well for their employment, their families, faiths, and communities; on the other hand, such meaningful training about relating to young adults and facilitating the personal growth of other people would provide valuable skills that could help any person in any career, family situation, or community setting. Addressing this aspiration means that the organization could ultimately address its contributions to, and therefore its value within, American society in general.

Aspirations for Venturers and Other Stakeholders

Venturers, representing the target clientele of the Venturing program, could not be asked to change too much when it comes to aspirations like mine, because when all is said and done the Venturing program needs to earn, and not expect, their interest and participation. The same is true for other stakeholders, such as parents and family members, local community members, college admissions personnel, and the like—the Venturing program needs to earn their respect and be recognized for the benefits it brings to society in the form of enhanced experiences for its young adult participants over nonmembers of the same age. While older adolescents do seek out and benefit from supportive relationships with adult mentors, an engaging program, replete with adventurous activities and likeable same-aged peers are what draws them in. The connection with mentors is something that the parents and other adults may hope for, but for the youth the connection with a mentor could be seen as merely a lucky bonus, if they notice it at all. Parents

and other stakeholders, on the flip side, hope for their youth to have a solid set of values and skills that will help those youth guide themselves successfully down the challenging path of life. We cannot simply aspire for young people to want what the Venturing program has to offer, but we can aspire for them to be willing to recognize all that the program provides.

Aspiring for recognition seems odd, doesn't it? But it's not odd when you consider the factors that work against the Boy Scouts of America as an organization, factors that overshadow the good provided to the youth by the organization's programs despite the organization's idiosyncrasies and pains from growing into the modern era. Considering that the organization's controversial (Wikimedia Foundation, 2010a) yet legal (Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute, 2010) membership standards that exclude homosexuals and atheists tend to offend the most progressive sector of the population, and even reports of the good of the organization are tainted (The Associated Press, 2010), it is difficult for anyone who has never been involved with the BSA in the past to find any value in joining it now. While I cannot in this document present all of the public relations efforts and difficult policy decisions that must be made by the organization, we can aspire for Venturers and other stakeholders to consider the BSA's programs' benefits of participation, and how the organization's maturation and change sought in the near future by one portion of American society can be more readily accomplished through their participation in the BSA's programs today. It is easier to bring about change from within, than from the outside, the group.

The criticism against the BSA's membership standards are surely unavoidable by everyone involved given their mass-media appeal, but the first question that must be asked is whether the positive development of society's young adults is best served by denying them the opportunity to participate in the program due to factors that are not directly related to the program's methods for fulfilling the positive development of youth. The lingering concern for me about families turning against the BSA is that the BSA organization explicitly distances itself

from teaching specific family values in that it does not aim to replace the values that parents and families impart to their children who are also Scouts, nor does it, as an organization, actively proselytize messages of intolerance. These organizational perspectives have existed since the founding of Scouting. What the BSA does do is maintain a set of membership standards that have been lawfully afforded to all private organizations by the highest court of the country, and it delegates specific membership standards to its local chartering partners across the USA. It is the chartering organizations who actually “own” every unit (as in crew, troop, pack, team, ship, etc.) of the BSA, and it is those units who are responsible for recruiting and approving their membership, from adult volunteer leaders right down through all programs’ individual youth members. And it is these chartering organizations, which happen to be mostly individual local religious institutions, affiliated with widespread Christian faith traditions in the USA like the Mormons, Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, and numerous others. If institutions representing those faith traditions wanted the BSA to grow, mature, and ultimately change its membership standards, the BSA would be obliged to do so, but until the BSA is faced with a mandate from a majority of its constituency or the nation’s legal system, the reasons for it to not change its membership policies will outweigh any obligation, or even possibility, for the organization to change.

The distinctions about membership, and who drives the BSA’s membership policy, may seem more academic than practical to you just like it does to me, which represents my perspective exactly: the youth members of the BSA are only tertiary characters in this drama that hosts conflict among religion, politics, and civil rights. To disband the organization outright, or for anyone to deny the organization’s programs from serving the positive development of young adults, simply hobbles the future potential of all youth who are caught in the verbal crossfire. Change would be more likely effected through increased engagement by family and youth who disagree with the organization’s policies, but who continue to teach the lessons and values to the

youth participants of the BSA programs to the furthest extent that the BSA's tolerance boundaries will allow.

The aspiration for potential Venturers and all other stakeholders is to recognize that the Venturing program's benefits outweigh its detriments and are quite distanced from the focus on volunteer Venturing crew advisors provided throughout this document. It is important to mention here because the program's crew advisors are the ones who will ultimately make the program attractive and beneficial for young people across the country. At the same time, the benefits of these advisors' efforts can not be achieved by our society unless there are youth, families, and other stakeholders willing to not lose sight of the forest of future potential because the ugliness of a single tree, although that ugly tree stands prominently as the gateway on the path into that metaphorical forest. All parties involved with the debate over the BSA's membership standards have the rights in our nation to air grievances, defend stances, and negotiate changes, but the murkiness of the issue and the indirect connection to the actual developmental activities of the Venturing program leaves no one with a right to strip opportunity from the youth of our nation.

Aspirations for Myself Related to the BSA, Venturing, and Crew Advisors

The aspirations I have outlined for the Boy Scouts of America organization, the Venturing program, Venturers and other stakeholders, and particularly for its crew advisors are not ones that I would quickly slough off to other people. Matters relating to adult volunteers advising youth and facilitating positive youth development are a professional and personal passion. The aspirations I am presenting here are ones that I would pursue if I were encouraged to do so by the organization's administration. Organizational connections aside, there are a few personal aspirations related to the research discussed in this report that tie together my perspectives about the organization, the program, the people, and my interpretations of the

participants' data to be discussed hence. Details of my personal aspirations throughout this chapter were meant to provide interested readers with an added perspective of depth of the analyst and author of the data, possibly shedding light for you (and me) regarding the why's and how's related to my analysis.

Earlier in this report I described my personal background and connection with the Boy Scouts of America, and how those experiences influenced my interests in educational programming design, youth development, and nonformal learning. The research discussed here is an application of what I have learned from both my formal education and personal experience as a volunteer with the BSA and particularly with the Venturing program. My personal aspirations bring everything together, outlining a path that I would like to accomplish in this field.

First and foremost, I want to develop myself professionally and personally so that I am prepared to work as a bridge between the resources and knowledge of the university and the needs of the public, particularly in a role with, for example, university extension or outreach. I am drawn to such a profession from my experience in my volunteer roles with the BSA as an adult where I have functioned mostly as a liaison, trainer, and program supporter for adult leaders of youth for the past 13 years. This combination of experience and background, especially when the most vivid of my childhood memories are added to the mix, has taught me a lesson that was easy to learn but still remains difficult to implement: there needs to be a healthy balance between fun and learning in this and all programs intending to serve as a context for youth development. This understanding is not new, as the founder of the Scout movement, Robert Baden-Powell, wrote in the early 20th century (before Scouting was coed), "The Scout Leader gives to the boy the ambition and desire to learn for himself by suggesting to him activities which attract him, and which he pursues till he, by experience, does them aright" (Sica, 2007, p. 303). This same sentiment was conveyed as "Scouting is a game with a purpose" by William "Green Bar Bill" Hillcourt (Seymour, 2010). Although this wisdom has been passed on through the decades, and I

have come to understand the challenging necessity of fun-yet-purposeful activities for youth in my own experience, mastery of this concept is fleeting given that what young people find fun, and what they should learn, changes with the times.

In a youth-led program like Venturing, where young adult participants are generally mature enough to find their own fun and create their own entertainment, the tasks of crew advisors where fun is concerned are usually in the form of brief prompts to motivate the Venturers to plan and pursue something fun. Moreover, crew advisors offer gentle corrective “nudges” intended to keep the activities or their planning on a fun and safe trajectory. The challenge that I have observed in my experience for crew advisors is their need to deftly infuse “purpose” and other benefits of the Venturing program. This purpose is so Venturers accept the benefits the program has to offer although, or in spite of the fact that, many of them would not readily admit that learning is something they typically do for fun. While there is a significant difference between the pivotal skills that a crew advisor could learn from training and the hard-won wisdom an advisor could acquire over time, training can help expedite the wisdom acquisition process for crew advisors by attuning their attention to points that matter most to the success of their Venturers, their crews, and themselves as advisors.

If I could lead trainings that attune advisors’ attention to any particular concept, that concept would be facilitating real-life lesson learning with older adolescents (Venturers) without being a buzz-kill to their fun and interest. I am convinced that just like classroom teaching, this concept requires both science and artistry in order to accomplish it well and with regularity. This is what I can aspire to accomplish in support of adult volunteers, like Venturing crew advisors, who work with older adolescents. Specifically, I aspire to develop programs and curricula that prepare adult volunteers from all walks of life for facilitating meaningful relationships and learning experiences for the young people they advise in positive youth development programs like Venturing.

On my way to fulfilling my personal aspiration, we have this research project. The opening chapters of this report discussed my personal background as a member of the BSA and as an early career researcher along with a theoretical and methodological setup of this research project itself. Recall from those introductions that I came to this research as a 23-year member of the Boy Scouts of America, where I attribute much of my meaningful upbringing during my youth to my experiences as a Cub Scout and Boy Scout. Furthermore, the experience of my younger years has sparked a professional interest as an adult to understanding the learning process in youth organizations that operate outside of formal school contexts. Inspired by memories, empowered by education, and—as I just described with my aspirations—motivated to improve a program and organization with immense potential for significantly impacting a broad swathe of American society, I developed and implemented a project that sought answers to foundational research questions regarding the element I believe to be the keystone of the entire Venturing program: the adult volunteers who serve as Venturing crew advisors. Helping the advisors helps the youth because the BSA’s mission and vision, and all of the goals of the Venturing program, fall squarely upon the crew’s advisor who is responsible for guiding the crew’s Venturers and their chosen activities in a manner that creates experiences and opportunities to learn. In essence, helping a single advisor should support the experience of approximately ten or more Venturers per year. So just like schoolteachers, the more capable the advisor, the better-off the youth.

⁴ In January 2010, I learned that the National Council of the BSA intends to transition away from “money and membership” as its indicators for local council Scouting success, and toward the indicators “tenure and advancement”. This represents a shift of the organization’s focus toward its program quality, but the shift does raise concerns about implementation, especially for the Venturing program where older adolescents’ interest in pursuing and earning formal awards has been minimal since the program began in 1998. Much waits to be seen when it comes to the impact that a focus on tenure and advancement will have on the Venturing program.

Chapter 6

Advisor Capabilities for Facilitating Positive Youth Development

The first of the three research questions that drove this research project focused on the participants' perspectives regarding their capabilities, serving as Venturing crew advisors to facilitate the positive development of the Venturers within their crews. With this research question, I wanted to understand the potential skills, and thus the potential training topics, that would benefit adult volunteers who work with youth. For the BSA organization, and its Venturing program in particular, knowing the training topics that emerge from the perspectives of active and practicing crew advisors, rather than topics generated by the administrators (both volunteer and professional) of the Venturing program, could lead to the development of trainings that prepare adult volunteers to perform a higher purpose through their efforts as volunteers. That is, a higher purpose that extends beyond ensuring the safety and entertainment of the youth who belong to the crew.

After reviewing the audio recordings, textual transcripts, and notes from my interviews with the participants, four capabilities emerged. These capabilities represent my synthesis of the numerous individual points of interest or emphasis that were components of the participants' responses. In metaphorical terms, these capabilities represent, say, a stone house that I have mortared together from a broad variety of "stones" of all shapes and sizes that were given to me by the participants with their responses and comments to the questions I asked them during our interviews. While my interpretation may be a personal construction, as in another researcher may have constructed different stone houses from the same set of loose stones, I did take steps to ensure that my representation of the participants' responses was plausible and trustworthy, as I described in Chapter 3. From that point, let me also offer that not every metaphorical stone was

used in the construction of these stone houses—some stones simply did not seem to fit well anywhere, and stone houses can not be constructed from just one or two stones.

The remainder of this chapter will provide a description of the four capabilities that were constructed to frame the major themes (as in the stone houses) which informed the participants' perceptions of the capabilities of typical crew advisors facilitate the positive development of the young adult Venturers in their crews. Subordinate to each capability are clarifying subthemes that help describe the capability through particular features that were mentioned in the participants' dialogue with me. Subsequent chapters will respond to the other research questions explored with this study.

Capability to Build Productive Interpersonal Relationships with Youth

The first capability identified by the participants' commentary addresses the importance of crew advisors having not just the personality, but also the skills and strategies that would allow them to build productive interpersonal relationships with older-adolescent youth. One reason why I see that advisors' interpersonal relationships with the youth as important is due to the Venturing program's design. Unlike typical school settings where one adult teacher stands before a group of students and then quizzes the young people on their understanding, the youth are expected to be standing before the group of their peers, and the advisor needs to be sitting among the Venturers offering brief bits of encouragement or suggestion that keep the youth on a positive and goal-oriented track. The advisor's dialogue with the youth can spark interest, provide encouragement, or answer questions. This may happen during brief and limited times when a crew advisor would have a conference with an individual Venturer⁵, or during activities and car travel when an advisor and two or three other youth are grouped together. Such connection would be for naught

if the Venturer had no sense of trust in the advisor, or if the advisor totally lacked all care or strategy for supporting the youth.

The capability to build productive interpersonal relationships with youth was expressed by numerous statements from the participants describing various character traits they perceived to be important for crew advisors, and the purposes or benefits for having those traits when working with youth. The participants' statements coalesced into five character traits, as in caring, trustworthy, patient, humble, and strategic, which I will describe below.

Caring

Advisors should have an honest and true concern for the current and future well being of the Venturers they work with in their crews, and for young adults in general. Expressing this care need not be explicitly stated, nor should it be overly emotional. Instead, care should be a genuine awareness and concern for each individual youth, which includes an interest in supporting both high points and low points of the youths' lives both within and beyond the crew and the Venturing program in general. This is not to say that each Venturer needs to be treated like the advisor's own child—in fact, such treatment might undermine the Venturers' relationship with an adult who is not their parent. But the level of care that was envisioned by the participants alluded to the type of care toward family member.

A range of descriptions and comparisons were used to describe the care that the participants believed an advisor should have toward their Venturers. Wally said that, "...the most important part about being an advisor is knowing the kids on a personal basis. That's what makes this [Venturing program] work. If you're not willing to know them on a personal basis, it won't work." Wally's concern based on his experiences as an advisor and watching other advisors was that advisors who try to maintain distance and degrees of separation between themselves and their

Venturers often do not build a relationship with the youth that would encourage the youth to seek them out with questions or concerns. Pam also described the advisors' care and concern in the context of a Venturer's challenging behavior, such as when a Venturer does something inappropriate:

Remember that caring about them is one of the best things, particularly when they do things that you're like 'that's the worst thing in the world, and I can't believe they even did it!' You've got to start with, 'I care about them [Pam takes a dramatic deep breath, for emphasis of the next point], so now, what's my solution for this?' And that's a tough thing to do when you're angry. I care about [my Venturers], so that's a tough thing to do when you're ready for— 'the throat!' [making air quotes with her fingers]. Take a deep breath, [and say] 'now what is the best way to solve this?' Even though they're not [my own children], I have a deep and abiding caring for them, which is different from *love* [emphasis hers], so to speak.

Like Wally, Pam is trying to impart the need for advisors to actively engage with their Venturers, building a caring connection with them. The participants described this connection with a variety of similes. Saying that an advisor should be like "a friend" to the Venturers was a statement that was at first spoken and then taken back by multiple participants. Dom went as far to say that the advisor-Venturer relationship was not a friendship with individuals, but that within his crew they are "a bunch of friends, with an established pecking order. ... They understand now that I am responsible for their safety and well-being, but I call them *my boys*" [emphasis mine]. However, in a later interview, Dom said, "But at the same time [as being their advisor], I feel like I'm more of an older brother to them than a parent." Both Pam and Ralph mentioned a "nurturing" component to being a crew advisor even though they clearly acknowledged that they were not the parent of their Venturers. To wit, Ralph said, "These are kids I'm watching grow. I want to give them skills, and help them become leaders. That's my job—except it's not a job."

Although the adjectives, comparisons, and other actual words used to describe the relationship were not universal across the participants, the sentiment was consistent. They believed that indifference or even a more distal and unexpressed interest was not effective for

advisors to have a meaningful connection with the youth of their crew. Genuine care and concern, distinct from love and other parent-like affection, is an integral component of an advisor's support of the crew, the Venturing program, and particularly the youth who are the crew's members.

Trustworthy

The experiences of the study participants offered strong indications of the next characteristic that is vital for advisors to be capable of building productive interpersonal relationships with youth: trustworthiness. "Trustworthy" is the first point of the Boy Scout law (see Appendix D), and although the focus of this study was on the Venturing program, the actual word "trustworthy" was on the minds of the participants because they have some past or continuing connection to the Boy Scout program. Although the term "trustworthy" may have been seeded into the minds of the participants and not a spontaneously generated adjective, the concept of an advisor being seen as trustworthy in the eyes of the Venturers was meaningful to the participants.

The primary and oft-repeated reason behind the participants' suggestion for the need for advisors to be trustworthy is that Venturers will discuss personal, non-Venturing issues with their crew advisors, particularly issues that the Venturers may not discuss with their parents. The participants see themselves as more of a quiet and attentive sounding board (or listening post) rather than a counselor of sorts. For example, with regard to personal discussions brought to the advisor by individual Venturers, Ralph said,

I've had a couple of those discussions, more as complaining by the youth, about parents or a situation or something like that, rather than a stronger interactive discussion. I usually put my listening hat on at that point because they're venting. I've never had a situation in terms of Venturing that required more of an interaction in terms of a [two-way] discussion, [I've been] more of a listening

post.... I think that anyone that needs to talk likes to have an ear. ...There's a need for venting, there's a need to get out some emotion.... I just try to provide that listening post for them. I've not come across a situation where I felt that I needed to dig deeper.

None of the participants mentioned to me having been approached by a Venturer to discuss a dramatic, overly negative, or potentially life-altering issue or choice according to their external and third person opinion. An external perspective on the perceived gravity of the Venturer's situation matters little, according to Helen. She said that when a Venturer who wants to discuss a topic that was personal to him or her approaches her,

...the decisions that they need to make don't tend to be life-altering, but they [seem to be] to that kid at that time. It is important that I treat those decisions with the gravity that the Venturer feels. Oftentimes these choices are about choosing between Venturing and other [often school or church-based] activities. Sometimes [supporting the Venturer in] making the decision is more important than the decision that is made.

When I asked the participants for their thoughts about why Venturers chose to bring to them their personal topics for discussion, their responses were quite clear: they believed that they had established a precedent with their Venturers that they were non-judgmental, that they would listen more and talk less, and if they did respond, then they offered calm and sensible suggestions while avoiding direct orders of what they should do. Wally has observed that the Venturers he has worked with typically seek out some type of connection with non-parental adults although those youth may not know exactly what it is that they want to receive from their connection with those adults. Similarly, Pam said that she could see that her Venturers look to her as a role model whether she tries to have that role in their lives or not. But Ralph and Dom offered the most vivid responses about why they believed their Venturers discussed personal topics with each of them.

When I asked Dom whether he had ever felt disappointed in any of his Venturers, he said,

I did, and I've never held it over their heads, and I never will. ...I try to put that in the past, and to give them the benefit of the doubt, and to progress and move forward instead of being stuck in a lurch. I don't need to point out what their faults are—they know what their faults are. I just say, 'hey man, you know better than this! C'mon, let's go!'

On a similar line of conversation about being disappointed in his Venturers, Ralph described how he saw his disappointment as a natural component of empowering his Venturers to lead themselves.

...Even in the cases where they make poor decisions, and the trip falls apart, they see that failure occurs, and that [failure] is OK. It doesn't mean that they're castigated, and they don't get yelled at [by me or others]. I simply ask, 'What didn't work? What have we learned from that? And how do we move on?'

According to the perspectives of the study participants, the importance of an advisor being trustworthy has less to do with the implementation of the Venturing program per se, as the program is outlined in Venturing leader trainings and printed materials from the BSA, and more to do with the natural (and, from the perspective of positive youth development, welcome) consequences of the relationships that Venturers believe they form with their advisors as a consequence of their shared experiences within their Venturing crew. Just from the few examples included in this section, we can see that there would be immense benefits to crew advisors being prepared with skills that not only build but also encourage and nurture these relationships so that we know that the Venturing program is providing supports for the real needs of youth.

Patient

The participants identified patience as an important trait for advisors to possess because a patient advisor provided Venturers with ample opportunity to take ownership of their crew. Also, it helped advisors develop a relationship with the mostly teenage members of their crew so that the crew members found value in the advisor's feedback. One of Pam's experiences with her crew offered an example of an advisor's patience leading to an improved sense of ownership by the Venturers.

It is really quite painful [for me to watch the Venturers] come up with their activity plans. Quite painful. They will banter and banter, and eventually will

come up with an activity and a plan. But I now know that when I say that I like one of their ideas, that's the kiss of death to their self-driven planning process... [because the Venturers will latch on to the idea that Pam indicated that she liked]. I know that I have to sit there quietly, and just keep [the Venturers'] conversation moving. I need to tell myself to shut up.

...I want to help them find their way. Not me tell them [how to find their way], but help them take control of [their lives]. This is one of the toughest things for us to do as an adult—sometimes we'd like to just tell them what to do. We need to help them find their way. I challenge you to show me the person who says they have all of the answers [about helping the Venturers without telling them exactly what to do]. I'd call them a liar.

While discussing the need for advisors to be patient and avoid taking over the planning and preparation for an activity, Wally shared his experience as both a pastor and a crew advisor. He explained that teenage youth will be more likely to do something if they feel that they have a stake in the ownership of how the event or activity is planned and when they have a choice regarding whether they participate or not. Overall, this ownership builds a sense of autonomy in the youth, which continues to feed into their interest in the overall program.

The flip side of patience also arose as a topic with the participants; they said that there is a need for advisors to be patient with themselves and their standing within the crew in addition to being patient with the Venturers. For example, when Dom was driving to his first meeting as his crew's newly appointed advisor, he was concerned whether or not he would be accepted by his crew's Venturers.

To be honest, I prayed about it. I said to myself, 'just go in, take a deep breath, and give them some of your experiences.' And within three months, we were a functioning crew. Before I got there, the youth were shooting hoops [with a basketball] each crew meeting. After I got there, we've had more important things to do [than shoot hoops].

And when I asked Helen and Wally to describe their relationship with their Venturers, both were hopeful, but without certainty, that their Venturers respected them and would accept what they had to offer. Wally went so far as to say,

...and some youth come [to the crew meetings] even though they don't like the crew advisor, but they like the other people who are there, and [the advisor] can

tell because those youth don't respond to anything the advisor says. The advisor just has to say 'OK, I'm not going to be friends with those kids right now, but this group is serving a purpose for them, and they may be learning something.'

Overall, the advisor's trait for being patient while both working with the youth and being calm with themselves provides for more opportunities for the Venturing program to work as it was designed. The youth take ownership in the planning and implementing of their activity ideas, and the advisors keep themselves at the rear of the group, offering brief moments of encouragement and guidance. Based on the participants' perspectives, when attempting to have the Venturers lead themselves, it takes more time for plans and expectations to develop—certainly more time than when a group of more experienced adults attempt a similar task.

Minimally Controlling

The concept crew advisors maintaining a minimally controlling stance toward the Venturers and operations of the crew spans a range of mindsets according to the dialogue with the study participants, but it is clear that all of these mindsets focus on the preferences and predilections of the Venturers taking priority over those of the advisor. When questioned by his Venturers, Ralph likes to respond to them with, "I'm just the lowly advisor—that decision is up to you." And while in other sections of this report I have emphasized the importance of the crew advisor to the successful implementation of the Venturing program, Dom considers all adult volunteers working with a Venturing crew to be totally interchangeable, saying that he could move away tomorrow and the Venturers in his crew would carry on without a hiccup in their activities, and train their next adult leader in the process. Some statements like these may have been mentioned to me, or even to their Venturers, by the participants more for dramatic effect than seriousness. However, they illustrate the mindset of these advisors because throughout all of

their ongoing experience with their Venturers they still avoid claiming that they have control over the crew and its decisions (except for matters concerning Venturer health and safety).

Staying true to the Venturing program's methods, the participants were explicit in their beliefs in the need for advisors to relinquish power to their crew's Venturers. During a caving trip with her crew, Helen shocked some of the accompanying parents with her degree of trust in her Venturers. After a first trip underground and into a cave with the entire crew and the accompanying leaders, a subset of the group wanted to go into a second cave for another trip underground. The youth needed an adult to accompany them, and Helen was the only adult eager to go in for a second trip underground—despite her navigational weaknesses.

I told [the Venturers] that I'd go back down with them, but they were completely in charge because I have absolutely no sense of direction underground. I told them that our lives were in their hands, and that they would need to read the map and figure out where we should go, and how to get out. The kids were fine with [caving]—we've done it before, and I knew they'd figure it out. But the parents that overheard me saying this to those kids, well, they were *aghast!* [emphasis hers] They said to me 'they're just kids, how can you put your life in their hands like that?'

But we went in, we came out, and there was never a moment of concern for me, or for those kids. ... That willingness to just go along and not interfere is hard for adults to do.

Ralph was also clear in his outline of what he believed to be the division of power between advisors and Venturers in a Venturing crew. "I think [advisors] need to come into it with a little bit more of a laid-back attitude, or a less controlling attitude. Because, in my opinion, the [goal] of Venturing is that [advisors] are giving their crew members the power. And that is a hard thing to do." Like Helen, Ralph mentioned the difficulty for adults in avoiding a need to continuously assume the full responsibility for all decision-making. And sometimes even the study participants, representing generally successful advisors, overstep their own advisor-Venturer boundaries that they believe in and defend. When this overstepping occurs, Wally is not afraid to make it right. When Wally upstages a Venturer during a meeting or activity, afterward

he “...usually calls the person on the phone to apologize and explain the situation. I’m one that feels the need to apologize to the youth. I want them to feel like they’re equals [with me and the other advisors].”

All in all, it appears that the study participants aim to keep themselves humble by fully integrating into their interactions with Venturers their beliefs that their personal opinions need not win-out over the Venturers’ every time, or even most of the time. As long as the risks are properly mitigated, advisors should be willing to accept the Venturers’ way of doing business (so to speak), even if they know there’s a different or better way for accomplishing that business. However, as we will see in the final character trait for crew advisors reported here, humility does not imply disengagement, it actually amplifies the need for strategy.

Strategic

Within this section is the description of the advisor traits that contribute to what I interpret as a successful advisor’s capability to build productive interpersonal relationships with youth in order to facilitate the positive development of the youth in their Venturing crews. Caring, trustworthy, patient, and humble seem like traits that have called for an advisor to be relatively passive while working with Venturers. They do not imply that an advisor must be passive, because the study participants’ comments imply the opposite. Crew advisors need to be active, aware, and engaged, but they do not accomplish these by being the center of attention and decision-making. They need to be strategic with the guidance that they offer to their crews and Venturers, mindful of both the content and the presentation of their guidance.

The study participants’ comments liken the operations of a Venturing crew to a well-prepared theatrical performance, with a clear division of duties between the foreground where the Venturers are active, and the background where the advisors are active. Sometimes it is necessary

for advisors to do more work to satisfy a need in the background than the amount of effort that would be required if they stepped into the foreground, but the foreground is decidedly not the place where a successful crew advisor belongs, except on rare occasions. Meeting agendas and trip plans were common items of background work for the study participants. Advisors often worked with their crew's president (the top, usually elected, youth officer of a crew) outside of the crew's regular meeting times, usually through e-mail, telephone calls, and special preparation meetings of the crew's youth officers and advisor(s). These special preparation meetings afforded the advisor a chance to help the youth officers formulate the specifics of a plan before the officers presented it to the general membership of the crew. And not only are these preparations strategic for the overall operation of the crew, but a strategy for working with the youth officers is also variable and necessary. When I asked Ralph what he perceived to be an optimal degree of structure within his crew, he replied,

First of all, I think it is important that I try to reflect the desires of the crew members. That is, if the crew members want more structure, then we add more structure. If they want less, we would try to have less structure, and try to make it their own crew. The level of structure that we try to keep is somewhat fluid, so that it can be adapted to the crew. I do like to have an agenda for every meeting, having one helps keep the meeting moving, and I usually go over it with the president, usually via e-mails [before the meeting]—where I'd say, 'at the next meeting coming up, here's what we ought to cover'. And sometimes the president will add things [to what I suggested], and sometimes she'll subtract things.

...In some ways, I feel that I'm putting just a little bit of pressure on, and trying to keep them focused on task, and letting them roll with it as they want to roll with it. Sometimes I put on more [pressure], and sometimes less, depending on how I'm feeling that our dynamic is. They're 14 year-olds, they're 20-year-olds—they're college kids. They're in a position where they're learning, or are old enough to start understanding, these things. ... This is all new to them, in many cases. They may have a structure in band [class at school], or a structure in track [team at school], but running their own meetings—that structure is new to them. It's taken me a little while to understand where they are... and to work with them.

Behind-the-scenes interventions like Ralph's were common topics among the study participants. The challenge seems to lie in the multifaceted demands upon a crew advisor.

Advisors want the program to be successful so that youth are attracted to join the crew and maintain their membership, but the benefits of the program come from what the youth learn while they are doing the program. The program's benefits are only possible to achieve when the Venturers are doing activities that they enjoy. Whether the Venturers know it or not, their activities are enjoyable because of skills (like planning and coordination) that they learn as a part of pursuing the activities they enjoy. While describing the "patience" trait of advisors, I wrote about the study participants' accounts of the laborious effort involved with observing the tedious process of Venturers coming to a consensus and making decisions regarding their future activity plans. Helen has observed that sometimes that tedious planning process, while youth-centric as the Venturing program was designed to be, comes to be resented by the Venturers. Also, the busy schedules of the Venturers during certain times of year make it impossible to dedicate large amounts of time to a preliminary decision like the mere destination of their next activity. Given her ongoing relationship and understanding of her crew's Venturers, Helen says that when schedules are crunched or consensus is hard won, "I bring a list of suggested activities for them to choose from. I think I know what they like, so I put together a list...." Which she said can serve as a starting point, or a set of boundaries for, the decision-making regarding the crew's next activity.

Pam, who prompts conversations for her Venturers in ways similar to Helen, considers vital an advisor's understanding of the balance between telling the Venturers exactly what to do and "...throwing something into them that gets them sparked and gets them going.... I'm not saying where it is we should go, I'm just saying let's get going somewhere." That balancing point is difficult to find, she continued, "Knowing what it takes to get them to do that... that takes some practice, some mistakes, some trial and error. [Advisors] have to develop that [skill]. It is a challenge." Ralph also experienced this balancing struggle, but he framed his method of balance among different calibers of crew activities. He said, "Sometimes [activities] don't happen. I'm

not going to let a summer high adventure trip fall through the cracks, but I am going to let other things fall through the cracks. I need to pick and choose my battles with the youth. There wasn't a lot of communication [prior to] last Thursday when [the crew] went mini-golfing and to Friendly's [restaurant], and only three or four youth showed up."

The expected ongoing relationship between the advisor and the Venturers also allows for an advisor's strategy to be cumulative, and the outcomes of their efforts to be latent. Pam and Wally had similar descriptions of their use of reflection tactics to help Venturers better understand themselves and to coach Venturers through their searches for solutions to their own perceived problems. One particular benefit of reflection, according to Pam, is that "it is important to have someone reflect back to [the Venturers] what their strengths are, and how to be aware of, and compensate for [those strengths] when [the Venturers] work with their peers. The point of the advisor is for someone to strengthen the position of the Venturer—to make their journey better." Pam spoke of facilitating that reflection from the perspective that the quality of what a Venturer learns increases when the Venturers learn it from their own thoughts and words based on their own experiences. Speaking less about lessons and more to ideas, Ralph's strategy that leads to latent benefits regards the "planting of seeds." He throws out suggestions of possible future trips, activities, themes, or projects, along with other crew-related ideas, while he talks relatively privately with two or three of his Venturers—sometimes during activities, sometimes during a car-ride to or from an activity, or even sometimes during their regular meeting. Then, he waits, without pressing the issue again, and recently he noticed that some of the seeds he has planted have been voiced by the Venturers and carried-out by the crew without the need for Ralph to intervene. By planting seeds and being patient, Ralph was able to help the youth accomplish what he had hoped for while avoiding any type of taking-over or other action that would detract from the autonomy of the youth that he values within his crew.

To summarize the advisor character trait of being strategic, we can turn to Helen, and her thoughts about giving advice to her Venturers: “They’re here [with the crew] because they want to be here, and they’re doing the activities because they want to be doing them. Those [reasons] are positives—they make it easy [for advisors] to offer experience. [The Venturers] don’t want advice. They’re not here for advice.” It would surely be *easier* for any adult to offer advice to a youth, but doing so would not make that person an advisor, but more of a director. I doubt that many teenagers would actively seek out the addition of a director to their lives. Where a director’s statements would be difficult for a youth to take in, an advisor’s guidance provides each young person with the opportunity to experience the consequences and remedies to his or her own actions based on his or her own perceptions and reactions. At the core of this character trait of being strategic is an advisor’s willingness and know-how for being strategic about helping young people learn and grow through indirect and sometimes behind-the-scenes interventions.

Across this entire capability to build productive interpersonal relationships with youth are traits of a person who understands that his or her connection with young people is the most valuable asset he or she can provide. An advisor’s service and support comes less from what he or she does and more from what he or she helps young people to do on their own accord. The relationship that advisors are able to build with their crew’s youth makes the next three capabilities possible. It is the next three capabilities that represent the valuable experiences that can enhance the skills of each young person involved.

Capability to Intentionally Facilitate Youth Development

Where the capability to build productive relationships with youth aimed to describe how volunteer adult advisors of Venturing crews made positive development possible for Venturers, the capability to intentionally facilitate youth development describes how that learning can be

optimized, so that the benefits that youth gain from their involvement with the program are greater than any gains that would come from chance alone. In other words, this capability means that advisors are doing more than merely supervising youth and chaperoning activities out of safety concerns and thereby observing youth “getting what they get” from their experience in the program. Rather, advisors are facilitating the Venturers’ achievement of relatively specific and generally predetermined positive development outcomes, making sure that the Venturers “get what they really need to get.” In the Venturing context, facilitating specific and predetermined outcomes⁶ would appear (metaphorically) as though the advisor was mapping out a trip. Successfully arriving to a destination requires a group to travel in the same direction, and for them to proceed far enough to not undershoot or overshoot their destination. Advisors could help this journey along by providing relatively subtle and gentle course corrections. The course corrections would come in the form of encouragement, cajoling, and nudging the Venturers to travel far enough for their lives to be impacted in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to them.

Both the challenge and beauty of the Venturing program is that Venturers achieve these learning outcomes under the advisement of a volunteer who has received very little training, and many times even less formal education, about the what’s and how’s of youth development. Despite the small amounts of training and education, the participants seemed to have helped youth achieve some form of relatively specific and generally predetermined character development outcomes that related to the mission and vision of the organization. Recall from the introductory chapters that while the Venturing Leader Specific Training outlines the organization’s mission, vision, and the BSA’s aims and methods, this brief exposure means that crew advisors are ostensibly left to their own devices for making their hopes that the organization has for each of its Venturers a reality.

The capability for advisors to intentionally facilitate youth development is presented here with some dispensation: crew advisors may not know, nor be able to specifically label and

identify, nor take credit for their crew's intentional facilitation. Identification and labeling would be skills that would come from a formal training on the topic. The skills identification and labeling are not important for advisors to be particularly helpful to the development and well being of each of the youth they work with. It would be helpful, however, for the continuing development of the advisors themselves if they could recognize, rationalize, and discuss their experiences as an advisor. With this report, I am able to highlight three facets of the participants' intentionality for facilitating youth development. These facets have been identified by me based on my educational background and synthesized from the dialogue I had with the participants. The three facets of this capability are vision, curiosity (or knowledge-seeking attitude), and coordination.

Vision

Vision is the first facet I identified within an advisor's capability to intentionally facilitate youth development based on my dialogue with the participants. This facet was not synthesized from direct questions asking the participants about their vision, but rather from their statements about their beliefs and descriptions of their typical methods of advisement that emerged during our conversations. That is to say that I did not probe their "vision" for their Venturers in their crew, but that their vision had shone through. The vision of the participants generally described what they wanted their crew's Venturers to learn or take away from their experience in the Venturing program. The vision also included macro-level plans for how they could make those takeaway benefits a reality for the Venturers they advise.

No two successful advisors had the same vision, but there were some standouts that help illustrate the capability for intentionality of which I am proposing vision to be a facet. In terms of the advisors' perceptions regarding *how* their crew's Venturers should gain meaningful

experience, a vivid image is offered by Dom's escalator metaphor regarding how the crew works together and how he simultaneously supports the individual Venturers and the crew as a whole in his role. When his crew's Venturers are working on program awards or learning a set of skills that will be necessary for an upcoming trip, he sees the learning process as one where they are all in it together, although the degree of understanding may vary across the crew.

We look at it as an escalator. Elevators just go up and down. There's no on and off on one side or another, just up and down. You can only get so many people on there at a time. With an escalator, you get them on, and some boys are working at lower levels while others work at the highest levels, but everyone can get on and we keep moving up together.

Instead of devoting his attention to one person at a time, Dom sees the need to invest the effort to keep everyone moving at the same time, generally in the same direction, relying on the interests and the range of skill levels within the crew to provide everyone with a sense of purpose. One aspect of Wally's vision matches Dom's, in that Wally has found that ensuring that Venturers have the opportunity to teach skills that they know to their peers in the crew is empowering, and actually builds camaraderie. Wally said that Venturers who teach skills to their peers may be timid at first, but then "they feel like they fit within the crew even though the crew members are not all friends in school." Similar to Dom, Wally dismisses what would be easier for what fulfills his vision. He takes chances on having youth with whom he is less acquainted with have opportunities to demonstrate their value to the crew so that everyone can be included and for the group to benefit from their work together.

One aspect of Ralph's vision for his crew is that the crew's program can be planned and delivered in a manner that "draws the youth in." He finds this important because he wants other adults and himself to be seen as supporters in the background of his crew's operations and avoid being overly concerned about whether or not the activities are going to be successful. Creating a program that draws the youth into it involves him being continually aware of the ability levels of his Venturers, so that the Venturers will find the crew's activities to be "...challenging, but not

overwhelming. Fun, but also gives them the opportunity to ‘practice’, if that’s the right word, to become adults, and to learn about the process of working as a group.”

In contrast to some of the participants’ visions about *how* they wanted to intentionally facilitate youth development, discussion regarding *what* they believed should be the focus of their crew’s Venturers’ growth and development also emerged. Helen appears to have thought deeply about her vision. Helen summarizes her vision as an advisor with a line of poetry that she attributes to Kahlil Gibran, by saying, “Your child is an arrow to be shot into the world.”⁷ In this poem stanza Helen projects that her efforts as an advisor go beyond any benefits that could be realized in the near future, or by people who are currently close by to each of Venturers in her crew. In a way, she is saying that her efforts to support the positive development of her Venturers will be a benefit to the world. Knowing this perspective makes the explicit “*what*” of Helen’s vision facet for this capability even more interesting: She hopes to be “subversive”, and to help the youth she works with to become subversive too.

When Helen uses the word *subversive*, she does not mean it in an evil and scheming sort of way, but rather as a quiet undermining of traditional norms, where people are quick to believe that teenagers are devious and are always searching for ways to steal or sneak away with getting exactly what they want. To counter this, she hopes to help young people learn how to work in a partnership with the adults in their lives. The subversion being that instead of joining the stereotypical adult fight against the youth, she wants to prepare the youth she works with to think like adults, allowing them to solve problems and answer questions in a way similar to adults. But Helen’s vision of subversion does have an immediate benefit to her, she says, “If I can teach [the Venturers] to operate in the world in an efficient, ethical manner, then it makes my life [as their advisor] easier.”

Curiosity (or Knowledge-Seeking Attitude)

The second facet to the capability for volunteer adult advisors to intentionally facilitate youth development is the need for curiosity, or knowledge-seeking attitude, for seeking out skills or tactics that would help an advisor better advise their crew's Venturers. This curiosity was presented by the study participants in two forms, either as statements about what they have already learned related to advising Venturers, or questions that they hope to find an answer for in the near future. Dom, for example, has attended practically "every BSA training available" across the BSA's Cub Scout, Boy Scout, and Venturing programs because he believes that trainings help an advisor to live the Boy Scout Motto of "Be Prepared." He said that those training experiences also afforded him a sense of "independence" because he feels that he would be able to "pick up the ball" if an activity that is supposed to be led by another adult volunteer "falls apart" because the volunteer becomes unavailable or he or she happens to arrive ill-prepared. In addition to activity preparation, Ralph noted that BSA trainings have helped him be aware of the safety of his crew's Venturers during their activities, saying that "assuring the safety of the youth is the first priority for advisors".

Pam and Helen each have questions that the BSA trainings have not answered for them. As such, they are seeking answers from literature and through personal connections with knowledgeable people they meet. Helen believes that "youth need to learn problem-solving skills" and she has been exploring methods for helping them to acquire these skills for a few years now. Pam's interests have been related to her beliefs that "advisors need to understand the adolescent need for risk-taking" and that the Venturing program can "provide a healthy and safe setting for risk-taking" for young adults. These beliefs came to her through a variety of literature that she has sought out in relation to adolescent development and youth work. Across all of these brief examples, one idea is clear—the curiosity of these advisors to seek out more information

and more training beyond the BSA's required minimums for Venturing crew advisors has enriched the program for the young people involved. Whether the advisor is taking safety considerations to heart or is exploring the inner workings of the adolescent psyche, the newfound insights are often ones that could not have been taught in organized training sessions.

Coordination

Advisors of Venturing crews do not, and cannot, perform in a vacuum. They invest significant effort into coordinating the numerous transactions and productions that occur within a Venturing crew of youth, the other adult volunteers, the parents of the youth members, the chartering organization that sponsors the crew, and any other people connected to the activities and events of the crew. As far as being intentional with the positive development of the crew's Venturers, coordination is also at the heart of an advisor's work. With his crew's tie to his LDS Church's young men's youth program, Dom has a monthly meeting with his church's bishop. These monthly meetings are essentially progress updates, where Dom has the opportunity to discuss any notable high or low points observed in the youth during their Venturing activities or their religious education class meetings that Dom also advises (given the dual role he has within his LDS Church). And while Dom's church's administration has established these progress meetings for communication across the various programs within the church community, other participants, like Pam, have similar discussions about the progress and status of the crew's Venturers with other adult volunteers working with the crew. I gathered from discussing this with Pam that the reason why she wanted to have discussions about the development of the crew's Venturers with the other adult leaders in the crew was so that her vision for the crew could be understood and supported by those other adults. She hoped that the other adult leaders would recall her vision during their own interactions with the Venturers of the crew. Pam also said that

she directly addresses a Venturer's individual growth in private conversations with that Venturer, asking them about where they feel that they are and where they hope to be in terms of their preparedness for particular challenges or tasks faced by the crew and that individual Venturer.

Wally's comments provided a look at how an advisor has an idea about what needs coordinating and how to make that coordination occur. In short, Wally admitted that he is a contemplative person and that he spends a significant amount of time reflecting on his experiences with the individuals in the crew as well as the crew as a whole. In particular, Wally often thinks about the current state of development for the youth he works with, and tries to estimate what long-term benefits his Venturers could achieve as a result of their ongoing experience with the crew. In addition to his personal reflections, you read earlier that Wally likes to employ group reflection as a strategy for building relationships between him and his crew members and among the crew members themselves. He says "reflection provides for a deeper relationship to be constructed between advisors and their Venturers, as well as among the Venturers themselves."

The coordination that I have highlighted here, as a facet of an advisor's capability to intentionally facilitate positive development of youth, is above and beyond the routine coordination that comes with an adult volunteer as a central figure in a youth-serving program. Just like sport coaches or other community organization leaders, Venturing crew advisors need to be concerned with setting meeting times and locations, prompting particular members to follow-through with things they owe to the group (like money or parental permission forms), and ensuring that everyone has an active and meaningful part in the group. All of the participants in this study mentioned at some point during our interviews that their crew faces a lot of competition with other after-school and out-of-school activity options that are available for Venturing-age youth. Helen even said that she has been trying for three weeks to hold her monthly crew officer's meeting without any luck in finding a time that a few youth and her can all meet together.

Coordination, then, is a part of every Venturing crew advisor's work with their crew, but from the dialogue with participants, it appears that successful advisors do not coordinate only the objective portions of crew membership (schedule, costs, preparations, and the like) but also delve into the more subjective topics related to the development of their youth.

If the capability to intentionally facilitate positive development of youth provides the direction that crew advisors choose to follow for supporting youth development, then the following capability represents the Venturing program's preferred mode of transportation for traveling in the advisor's chosen direction. The Venturing program aims to teach a specific set of skills to young adults, and the program was designed to have activity planning be the vehicle for bringing those specific skills to fruition.

Capability to Utilize Activity Planning for Youth Development

The Venturing program was designed from the beginning to be flexible, so that practically any type of interest group could sponsor a Venturing crew. While over 80% of Venturing crews registered with the BSA have an outdoor high adventure focus (Boy Scouts of America, 1998b), most crews use some aspect of the outdoors as their theme, such as backpacking, environmental conservation, or just simply whatever outdoor trips or travel strikes the fancy of the Venturers. Within the crews with this theme, there can be a large amount of variety. To this point, Pam considers "the outdoors [to be] the classroom for the Venturing program, where we teach our youth problem-solving skills and teamwork" with the challenges and obstacles that occur as natural consequences of being active in settings away from shelter and civilization in general. And Ralph believes that outdoor activities not only "draw-in the youth", but they also keep them coming back to his outdoor high adventure Venturing crew and its activities.

The other 20% of the Venturing crews pursue a number of other interest areas, including Sea Scout ships with their interest in boating and nautical skills, religious life crews connected with religious organizations that focus on the spiritual development of youth, and arts and hobbies crews that can focus on anything from the collecting of particular items to community theater performances—among many others. No matter the interest area, the Venturing program was designed to adapt to the needs of the chartering organization that sponsors the Venturing crew. While most Venturing crews utilize the BSA's expertise in delivering a program related to interest areas for which the BSA has produced educational materials for both youth and advisors, some sponsors seek just the basics from the BSA and its Venturing program, such as liability insurance coverage, a set of ideals, and a community of support that can be tapped when needed. The practical constants that exist across all types of Venturing crews are that youth should be leading themselves and making decisions about adventurous activities and events they would like to participate in. Moreover, a set of volunteer adult leaders should be supporting the Venturers' autonomy, safety, programming interests, and personal development in the background of the crew's operations. The program does not promote the personal development of youth by sitting them in front of the village elder who each week tells them wise life lessons they should know and remember. By design the program expects that all of the relevant and useful life lessons come from the Venturers' experience in the world, one meeting, activity, trip, or event at a time. Thus, this third capability addresses a demand that is placed on crew advisors according to the established methods of the Venturing program. Based on the exchanges I had with the participants, successful Venturing crew advisors need to have the capability to utilize activity planning as a vehicle for positive youth development.

Activity planning seems to be a useful method for facilitating personal development experiences for youth because the youth themselves are directly affected by their planning efforts, for better or for worse. Planning is at the core of the Venturing program experience for youth,

although the program is not advertised that way. The act of planning may not seem as attractive to youth as the object of the planning, such as the adventures and activities with their same-age peers in the crew, but the planning process is at the heart of every Venturing crew's operations. As Helen put it, Venturing teaches lessons to youth in ways that they can understand because, "we do it with fun, we do it with planning, and we do it with 'well, we forgot to make the reservation, we're here at the rock gym, and they don't have the staff [available to help us].'" When I asked what happened to the crew once the rock gym turned them down, she said, "We learned. We all went out for ice cream [instead of climbing the rock walls at the climbing gym], and we learned." In Helen's example, the Venturers experienced the consequences of their failure in the planning process, and while those consequences did not present any lasting harm they were socially awkward to the point that the Venturers would remember that experience and learn how to avoid that situation in the future. It also seems to the participants that activity planning by a group of young people for their own benefit presents a relatively low level of risk because the Venturing program is a "free, but controlled environment" in Ralph's words, where the only people that the Venturers affect are themselves.

Providing a safe environment for failure is a top priority for these advisors, because their experiences have shown them that young people learn more from their failures than they do from their successes. Wally experienced an extreme example of his Venturers' lessons learned from failure when, a few years ago, his crew did not go on a major trip or outing for almost an entire program year because of a string of consecutive failed attempts to organize themselves by agreeing on a date, destination, or an activity. It was a frustrating time for Wally, not only in watching the youth, but also because of his interactions with the parents who were also frustrated at the youth's challenges to make their trips happen. With this group of youth, though, Wally did not want to give in and set the precedent that if they fail someone will just come in, take over, and fix the situation. While Wally's crew's regular meetings still happened as scheduled, and the crew

did do some smaller activities throughout the year that they enjoyed, when it came to traveling and weekend-long outings, Wally's mantra became, "If you plan it, we'll go. But I'm not planning anything for you." Both the youth and the adult leaders, including Wally, learned a number of lessons, and once a slight shakeup of the youth officers occurred at the crew's next elections, the crew quickly resumed an active and adventurous level of programming that has continued through the time of my interview with Wally.

A second benefit of activity planning utilized as a medium for culturing youth development is that trip leadership requires a type of social interaction that makes palpable the boundaries between the leaders (who should be youth) and the supporters of the leaders (who should be the crew advisor and other adult volunteers with the crew). The leadership of trips and outings with a Venturing crew typically requires very specific communication and particular leadership roles to be established and honored by members of the group. In a youth-led organization, the leader of the trip would be easily known by the trip participants, so if an adult volunteer was leading, or takes control of an outing, everyone would have an idea that the adult had crossed the "youth-led" boundary. For this example, "palpable" refers to the clarity in the youth leadership versus adult advisement roles. In a colloquial sense, during an outing that is supposed to be led by the Venturers, the adult volunteers must *go with the flow* of the crew and its leaders.

Similar to some of the tenets of capabilities that were described previously, a balance is required of the advisor when activity planning catalyzes the most meaningful growth opportunities for Venturers. For example, the advisor does need to take active steps to prepare the Venturers who are leading crew trips and outings for the demands of their leadership role. Helen describes this as her responsibility to provide those Venturers with "tools, and how to use those tools. Planning, communication, listening to learn, knowing and using your resources—all those are tools that are important in life. They can help with school, with interpersonal relationships,

and with their jobs.” She spoke about her responsibility to prepare her Venturers for leading their peers within a story about a Venturer’s first experience with organizing an activity for the whole crew. The Venturer suggested to the crew that they go horseback riding at a stable that outfitted daylong group rides, and her peers were enthusiastic about the opportunity. That Venturer was asked to look into the details and bring information that she found to the next crew meeting. That Venturer went home and sent an e-mail message to everyone in the crew containing a short sentence, a link to the stable’s Web site, and her name at the bottom. Helen contacted the Venturer to explain some of the additional details that would be helpful, such as the stable’s dates and times when rides would be available in the near future. The stable’s Web site asked interested groups to call for dates and times. So the Venturer called the stable manager, found out that the one date Helen had suggested was already booked, said thank you, and hung up the phone. A week later, at the next crew meeting, the Venturer was asked by the crew about the details the Venturer gathered regarding the horseback riding trip, and the Venturer replied, “We can’t go because they’re booked on [that date].” Helen then asked, “What dates did they have available?” The question was answered with just a shoulder shrug. It took a few weeks, and Helen admitted it was at times frustrating, but Helen continued to coach the Venturer through the planning process. The Venturer did eventually make the plans, and the crew went on a horseback-riding outing. It was a hard-won victory for Helen.

It would have required much less time and effort for Helen to just involve herself with the planning process. Dom has learned from personal experience at his job and as a crew advisor that not allowing the youth to be responsible, and interjecting to the point of “micromanaging” does not contribute to the long-term benefits of the youth. He believes that, “if you treat the youth like they’re leaders, they will act like they are leaders,” and he continues by discussing how in his crew he wants, “every youth to be responsible for an activity. Newer guys can be in charge of simpler activities, and older guys in charge of challenging activities, because this creates a youth-

run program” in the crew. “Sometimes it’s easier to micromanage, but it’s not good,” Dom concluded.

The capability for successful crew advisors to work within the Venturing program’s methods and utilize activity planning to spur youth development appears to reiterate a theme also described for other capabilities: successful advisors tend to avoid what would be easiest for them to do personally in order to provide the growth opportunity for their Venturers. By developing this capability, advisors enhance the personal growth experiences for the Venturers in spite of the reality that the journey for the Venturers and advisors alike may become less direct and fraught with added obstacles and challenges. This capability is made possible by the productive interpersonal relationships that an advisor is able to build with her/his Venturers, and it is provoked by the advisor’s vision for and coordination of the personal development of their Venturers.

Capability to Implement Different Leadership Approaches for Youth and Other Adults

The fourth and final capability that emerged from the participants’ perceptions about capabilities that aid the facilitation of positive development of Venturers actually does not focus on Venturers at all. The focus of this capability is on the advisor, and how well they are able to manage the other adults (volunteers and/or the parents of Venturers) involved with their crew. The previous three capabilities focused on the advisor’s approach to advising youth, and this capability targets the need for a different set of leadership strategies when working with other adults.

The reasons behind why the study participants had challenges in working with other adults and therefore needed to employ strategies different from those that they would use with youth differed from advisor to advisor in their clarity. Dom reported that, “It takes more time [to

work] with the youth because they need the time” to learn and understand what he told them, while “it takes more effort with the adults because of the need to navigate the social dynamics.” Some of the social dynamics mentioned by Dom centered on his age. At 26 years old, he felt as though he faced additional scrutiny when communicating with parents and other adults in the crew. Age could be a contributing factor to Dom’s challenges, but Pam (as a mother of three college-age or older children) said,

I’ve had real significant challenges with both youth and adults, but I’ve had more challenges with working with adults. They’re just different. I’ve had some challenges with [another adult in the crew] who can’t stop... telling the Venturers what to do. ...I’ve not found the magic bullet to help [the other adult leader] stop hovering over the group.

However, presenting these comments here was not intended to paint broad strokes over all other adult leaders involved with the study participants’ crews. For example, when Ralph first became a crew advisor, he was grateful for his associate advisor, who is still invaluable to him after years of working together. He said, “that was a big fear for me—whether I’d have a counterpart to lean on. My associate advisor’s strengths complement mine very well. [That person] can do things I can’t do.”

Through my dialogue with the study participants, it appears to me that three factors influence whether the other adults will be helpful or hindering to the crew advisor. The three factors are (1) whether the other adult understands the Venturing program and its methods, (2) whether the other adult can allow their child—and other youth—in the crew to fail, and (3) whether the other adults and the crew advisor have an open channel for two-way conversation. Because of these factors and their influence on the advisor, the Venturers, and the other adults of the crew, the participants described some strategies or other responses that they have had when working with other adults. While Wally has not been 100% successful in the past, he has tried to get as many adults affiliated with the crew as possible, even the Venturers’ parents who do not wish to be regularly involved with the crew, to attend the basic training for crew advisors and

their associate advisors so that they can at least understand the basic principles of the program and methods by which it works. Whether they seek the training or not, he also tries “finding jobs for them to be helpful to [the crew]” and also “laying down the rules” to the adults regarding how the crew works.

Whether they were called “rules” or not, the study participants also suggested another guideline that they recommend for advisors: limiting the number of adults who have direct contact with the youth of the crew. Simply shooing the adult onlookers away was not a tactic recommended by the advisors, and their means of dealing with this situation were situation dependent. When possible, Wally prefers to have his crew officers prepared to lead their meeting prior to meeting time so that Wally can hold a separate meeting with the crew’s other adults in a separate room. During this separate meeting, Wally would tell the adults what the youth were planning and discussing in the next room, and he would answer their questions and recruit them for supporting those plans. Helen, on the other hand, was a crew committee chairperson for years before assuming the role as the crew advisor. From that experience, she came to believe that the crew committee chair was responsible for keeping the adults other than the crew advisor out of the room holding the youth meeting. Helen has since trained her current committee chair to continue assuming that responsibility. She says that by maintaining a physical separation between the Venturers and the other on-looking adults, “the expectations for youth leadership” are reinforced for both the Venturers themselves and the other adults connected to the crew. She also says, “it’s hard for parents to accept failure” and thwarting any attempts for those adults to prevent any of the Venturers’ plans from going awry helps ensure that the Venturers “learn responsibility” from dealing with their own consequences in the safe-for-failure environment that the program intends to establish.

Based on the examples described above, an advisor’s capability to utilize different approaches between youth and other adults involved with the crew is a necessity for one simple

reason: the youth are the target audience for the program, and everyone should be involved with the program for the benefit of the youth. That said, the approaches an advisor should be capable of using with youth that were described in the first three capabilities tended to be softer, focused on creating learning opportunities for each Venturer, and dedicated to building a setting that allows young people to learn and grow through their self-made opportunities. This fourth capability helps ensure that the youth are protected from other well-intentioned adults who, deep down, probably have the same hopes for growth and prosperity for the Venturers, but who do not fully grasp the existing intelligence and abilities of most teenagers—even their own children.

Summary of Capabilities Emerging from Participant Perceptions

Earlier in this chapter, I described the four capabilities as stone houses that I have mortared together by connecting the numerous individual “stones” of topics and points that came out of my interviews with the participants into purposeful configurations. This figurative construction effort has produced four structures that could be tested with future research studies to determine whether they can “bear weight” and “stand up” to inspection and usage, or if they need to be further revised. But to varying degrees, each of the capabilities described in this chapter can serve as a benchmark for training and developing adult volunteers who wish to become successful crew advisors. “Success” could, in the future, be defined in terms of the benefits the Venturers gained from their experiences with their Venturing crew instead of the method that I used with this study, which was to define success according to the perceptions of each of the participants’ local Venturing program communities or my own personal informal assessments. And while I do not believe that attempts to “scientize” the training and development of adult volunteers would be warmly welcomed by the organization, agreement could be forged regarding methods to optimize the effort and investment made to prepare the adult volunteers to

become efficacious in facilitating their Venturers' personal development through their experiences in the Venturing program.

Based on the dialogue with the study participants and the capabilities of successful crew advisors that were synthesized from their experiences, the existing set of basic training experiences required of incoming Venturing crew advisors do not address these capabilities. In over-simplified terms, the series of "hard facts" provided by the BSA's set of basic trainings for crew advisors are mismatched with the "soft skills" that advisors themselves discussed about their own experiences. The next two chapters continue by adding additional weight to the argument for the need for additional soft skills in the basic training of adult volunteers who become advisors to groups of older adolescents in order to adequately prepare them for the realistic challenges that await them in their roles. Chapter 7 explores the next research question, where the study participants are provided with the hypothetical opportunity to redesign the basic trainings for crew advisors. There, I will present a new set of "stone houses" related to the suggested improvements to the training process and content. Chapter 8 covers the third research question where the participants respond to the potential utility of adding the *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents* to the training of crew advisors.

⁵ While the BSA youth protection policy (Boy Scouts of America, 2007a) prohibits private one-on-one contact between an age 21+ adult and a youth member (unless the youth is the child of the adult), it does not prohibit outright the constructive consultation between an advisor and a youth member when that consultation is in plain view of other adult leaders, youth members, and/or the youth's parents. For example, a conference between an advisor and a Venturer could take place in the far corner of the same meeting room where the rest of the crew is gathered as long as the conference is in plain and clear sight with one of the other leaders and members.

⁶ The terms "specific" and "predetermined" being used much more loosely in this nonformal learning context than how they would be used in a formal educational setting.

⁷ The wording of Helen's statement is not an exact match to Gibran's, but the concept is arguably parallel. In Gibran's (Gibran, 1923) poem *On Children*, he wrote, "You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth" (p. 18).

Chapter 7

Improving the Training of Adult Volunteers

I have had the honor and pleasure of serving the BSA on a national level for the past few years. In May of 2007, I began working with the national Venturing membership development committee. In October of 2008, when the BSA initiated a major reorganization of its professional staff and volunteer committee members at the national level, I transitioned to the national new-unit growth task force. In May 2009 I was able to shift my service to a task force that was better aligned with my professional and personal interests in youth development by joining the national youth development committee's research and technology task force. Throughout my service at the national committee level of the organization, I have not yet had the opportunity to be directly involved with the development or redevelopment of a nationally delivered training syllabus. However, I have provided solicited feedback and commentary regarding the drafts of new training materials. My colleagues know of my interests and skills in working with training and instructional design in general. So I am hopeful that an opportunity to be involved with a training design project may one day come my way. Whether I would ever be asked to be involved with the design of a training program for volunteers in the BSA where the findings of this research study could be applied is totally uncertain. But the BSA and the Venturing program are also serving this research project as a testing ground for other youth development organizations, and the study participants have provided information that may be valuable to adult volunteers serving in all types of organizations.

The BSA is a large organization. It is highly politicized because of its size. Direct oversight of every single person, especially of every single national committee member, is practically impossible, so affiliations, personal relationships, and individuals' assessments of

volunteers and professionals drive the processes by which work is delegated. Therefore, people delegated to a task may be generally reliable, trustworthy, and well-regarded by the professional or volunteer who needed to ensure that the work was delegated and the task was completed, however, they may lack qualifications that would link them to successfully achieving that task. It pains me quite deeply to inform readers that the development of training syllabi are also subject to this same politicized process within the national BSA organization—yet I refuse to be naïve to the extent where I would believe this process does not exist in other large organizations and corporations. On the other hand, I have been happy to see that, at times in the past few years, I have met a few members of the training design project teams who have true professional and personal background in education, training, or instructional design. But I have learned that the people with background relevant to a BSA training design task are often individuals who are working on a team of ten or more people, where the majority of the other members on the committee could easily disregard a suggestion made by their single voice.

In all of this instructional design and development process for the BSA, though, where are the volunteers working on the front lines with the youth for whom our organization exists to serve? That is an important question. Some volunteers serving on national committees “wear many hats”, and some of them may be working directly with youth as a leader of a pack, troop, or crew in their local council. It is more often the case that the national committee volunteers are not working directly with youth members, as they came to be noticed and recruited through their work in administrative capacities, on committees, and in leadership positions at the council level (or higher) that supported those who directly serve the youth membership. Still others are involved in busy national committee roles, where their available time as a BSA volunteer is consumed with their national service, while others choose to focus on their national service roles due to their interest in that level of support and decision-making. For example, throughout my time as a graduate student, with constraints on my schedule and finances combined with my

personal interests in influencing the organization's policy and practices, I have occupied the last two categories. All of this context aside, the design of the existing Venturing Leader Specific Training was based on historical trends from the Exploring program combined with the objectives of the Venturing program when the program was created in 1998. From that time to the present, the wisdom of experienced crew advisors has not been gathered in earnest to inform the content and delivery of that training. With so many layers, visible and invisible, within the BSA, I believed it was important to hear what the participants, representing successful crew advisors, had to say about the basic training program (VLST).

The dialogue with the participants revealed suggestions and comments for improving the basic training of new Venturing crew advisors that spanned three distinct categories: improvements to the training process, improvements to the training content regarding the role of the advisor, and improvements to the training content regarding crew management. Each of those categories of suggested improvements to the training have subcategories that clarify the suggestions of the participants. The interview questions that I asked, prompting these suggestions from the participants, focused on the difference between what they know now as advisors, what they knew when they started in their role as crew advisors, and the methods by which they learned what they believe that they need to know in order to be a successful crew advisor. My intention for asking interview questions on the topic of advisor training was to garner the participants' first-hand experience with what they had learned and the methods by which they learned the skills that they find most useful to supporting youth as a crew advisor.

Suggested Improvements to the Training Process

Determining the Necessary Extent of Training

My personal biases were challenged by some of the participants during our interviews, forcing me to reconsider many of my assumptions about adult volunteer training. I approached this entire research study armed with my education and know-how determined to find training enhancements that would optimize adult volunteer preparation to advise and support older adolescents in the Venturing program. Ralph stopped me in my tracks when he expressed with confidence a sentiment that could be paraphrased as, “Ignorance was bliss.”

In response to my question asking what Ralph wished he would have known about being an advisor before he assumed the role for his crew, he said,

I don’t know, maybe it was better that I didn’t know anything.... Part of it is that I don’t know terribly well how other crews run. I have only an experience inside of my own bubble in terms of how our crew runs, and I think it runs successfully. I don’t know if another crew runs vastly differently from the way that we do. And, therefore, what’s the learning aspect? How do you teach someone how to put together and run a Venturing crew? ... There’s certainly the training foundation, but because there’s a lot of freedom in Venturing as to a direction to go into, there’s so much flexibility in there that I don’t know how you teach that at this point in time [when a volunteer is new to the advisor role], other than [telling them] ‘expect the unexpected and enjoy the ride!’. I don’t have a good feel for what you have to lay out beforehand.

Later in the interviews, Ralph followed up the above statement with additional detail about his perspective regarding basic training for new crew advisors:

I think the Scouting program provides a framework that is an important level of training that an advisor needs to understand. You have to work within the system. But within that system, how that develops, I think, can use both inside and outside influences.... I think that’s what I was getting at when I said maybe it was better that I didn’t know anything, because if I would have known more about [the BSA system], maybe I would have run from it.... Any adventure that someone starts out with, they have an illusion or a feeling of what it is and you get into the middle of it, and there’s always this thought that if I would have known what I was getting into before I got into it, then maybe I wouldn’t have gotten into it.

Ralph raised a dilemma for me—if crew advisor training is *improved* from my perspective, would the *improved* training drive some incoming adult volunteers away from serving as crew advisors in the Venturing program? Ralph believes in the benefits of incoming volunteers having the opportunity to experience the Venturing program on their own, and for them to have the opportunity to use their outside perspectives to innovate upon the program, and I acknowledge his position. There is certainly no way for brand new crew advisors to completely understand the fullest potential that the Venturing program can provide for the positive development of youth without them having a clear understanding of the context for their efforts and the Venturing program's methods. However, I believe that precedents are important, especially during the training and development process of people who are new to a setting like the Venturing program. Allowing new crew advisors to experience their crew without any framework for the minimum methods and expectations of a Venturing crew could lead to habits and trends that will be difficult to undo—especially when advisors have the evidence embodied in their own crews to say, “That method is working for us no matter what you say in your trainings. Why would we need to change anything?” Overall, while I recognize Ralph's point about how training could have scared him away, I do not believe that he represents the general population of crew advisors—rather, he is a special case.

Ralph's point about the challenges presented by the amount of freedom that exists within a Venturing crew does indeed require attention. Many youth programs have a prescribed program and interest area: Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and members of the Girl Scouts of the USA, for example, use the process of earning rank, badges, and awards representing graduated ability levels and proficiencies (or experiences) with particular skill areas as the basis for the youth's involvement with their program. The Venturing program, from its inception, has perceived the pursuit of “advancement” as an optional component of the program that Venturers and their crews could achieve according to their own interests. Without a concrete program, incoming advisors

may feel overwhelmed, believing that they could do anything, or everything, in the world. The key here is to help advisors understand how to work with the interest area of the crew. This interest area is typically defined by the chartering organization of the crew. Some examples of interest areas could include: outdoor high adventure, religious life (religious education), arts and hobbies, sports, or even more specific definitions like mountain climbing, service to the homeless, community theatre productions, and playing softball in a community league. While there is freedom in the Venturing program, there are limits on that freedom. Advisors should know from the beginning that their Venturers have much, but not an infinite amount of, leeway with the interests and activities of the crew.

While Ralph caused me to question the overall need for improving the training of new Venturing advisors, Pam's perspective came from the opposite point-of-view, as she believes that the crew advisor training is inadequate for developing the skills that advisors would need to support the development of youth in their crew. When I asked her whether she felt adequately prepared to assume the crew advisor role after she took the basic training, she said,

No. That's not what they teach you in your training. That's not what your training is about. There is so much that you have to come forth with from your life experiences and personal experiences. The Boy Scouts don't want to be in the business of youth development—they want to be in the business of delivering a program. This is just my opinion. When you ask them, they don't want to be mistaken for youth development, they want to be a program for youth. And so the training that I had was a whole lot of good information about what we want [Venturers] to do—we want these kids to take over [the decision-making for the crew]. That's a great expectation, so what will these kids do when they take over? They'll have these activities, and you'll want them to have consultants and to consider recognitions, but you don't have to. You'll want maybe a uniform, you'll perhaps want to do a superactivity. So, [the training is] a lot of the [details about the Venturing] program and what brings [the Venturers] in. To me the training is the who, what, where, and when, but it is not the why and how.

...[Advisors] are always going to have the challenges, because this is a challenging age group to work with. But it says even more why we need our [advisors] to understand [youth development]. They need to know that working with youth is a challenge. The VLST syllabus doesn't begin to address any of that information.

Pam believes that the training for Venturing crew advisors fails to prepare those advisors for the challenges inherent in working with teenage youth. She feels that the organization has shied away from its taking ownership of its role as a youth development organization (despite the organization's mission and vision, which I discussed in the introduction to the study), and instead the organization has framed itself as a service provider. In Pam's case, she feels that she has been successful as a crew advisor because she has background in youth development through her work as an educator, and not because the BSA's training has given her the know-how necessary for becoming a successful advisor. In other words, Pam's success was due to chance and not due to preparation.

While Ralph and Pam's statements seem diametrically opposed, they share an important characteristic in that they both indicated a need to explore the necessary extent to which crew advisors are prepared for the challenges of their roles. Ralph's view that incoming crew advisors could be scared away from the role with a comprehensive training program is met by Pam's opinion that the training does not go nearly far enough to prepare advisors for the real-world challenges that they will face when working with youth. These two participants continued their interviews to provide other thoughts regarding the improvement of the training, but their apprehensions about the program were their initial, gut reactions. Is either of these reactions better than the other? It could be possible to combine them in a way to satisfy the individual differences among adult learners, meaning that a training program could be developed that avoids scaring off incoming advisors while also enhancing advisors' capacity to work with youth. Coincidentally, the other participants' suggestions could also inform a response to the training dilemma raised by Ralph and Pam, as described in the next section.

Methods of Training and Knowledge Acquisition

A second set of improvements to the training process emerged from the participants' discussions about the methods by which crew advisors are trained by others, and the ways that advisors acquire their understanding of the skills and roles related to working with the Venturing program and the youth of their crews. The VLST, described earlier, is a five- to six-hour training course for adult volunteers working with the Venturing program, and is a required for all crew advisors. The course covers the basics of the Venturing program's ideals, methods, and structure, utilizing a variety of presentation methods, including group discussions, short and simple interactive games, and question-and-answer sessions. Ironic as it may seem, the strongest suggestion made by participants of this study about improving the training of advisors represented a significant deviation from the current VLST and its delivery. That is, they recommended that a period of observation or shadowing of experienced and skillful crew advisors be added to the process for training and developing the skills of adult volunteers assuming the crew advisor role.

Helen credits much of her current understanding of advising Venturers with the observations she was able to make while serving as the crew committee chairperson for a skilled advisor who preceded her in her advisement of the crew. She commented,

I had the example of other people.... The guy who was our first advisor—I used to shake my head and marvel at his patience. How can he just... you know, let the kids take 45 minutes to make a decision that should have taken two. They'd meander, but they'd get there. How else were they going to make a decision and own it?

In addition to her crew advisor predecessor, Helen also credits her husband, who has been involved with the BSA since his youth and has served as an associate advisor to her crew as well as a Boy Scout troop Scoutmaster. She says that he is a positive example of varying his methods for working with youth based on their maturity level.

[My husband] treats kids age appropriately. He does different things with an 11-year-old—[and] when he starts treating a 16- or 17-year-olds like they're adults, he will say something [for more mature listeners], and [the Venturers] will go 'Mr. [X]!' [shocked that he'd say that to them]. And he'll say, 'Hey, you're all 17, I can say that to you, I wouldn't say that if the new guys were around.' [Acknowledging their maturity] makes [the Venturers] feel special, and valued.

It says in the Wood Badge [training course] syllabus that you have no idea of the power that listening to a youth has, and listening to them, valuing them, and respecting them just has *so much power*. [Truly listening to Venturers is] good for them, good for you, it's a powerful thing. And that relationship of mutual respect is the strength of Venturing.

Helen's point, in this example, is that she believed there are nuances and subtle details that go into becoming a successful crew advisor, and those details may not be transmissible via a typical training program. With the opportunity to observe a skillful advisor, the trainee could absorb some of these small details that may not be written into a training program as learning objectives or goals. The observers would also broaden their focus beyond just the crew advisor, but also the crew's entire operations with the advisor at its core. Pam and Ralph each briefly mentioned the need for an incoming crew advisor to know what a successful Venturing crew looks like, because neither of them had a clear conceptualization of a crew's operations prior to assuming their role. While Helen was serving in a different role within her crew prior to becoming an advisor, Pam was looking to bring an enhanced set of opportunities to her daughter's Girl Scout troop after participating in a Boy Scout troop with her two sons. Ralph assumed the advisorship of his crew in this midst of tragedy when the crew's original advisor had passed away.

The idea of trainees observing skilled leaders is not lost on the BSA—they currently recommend that all units (packs, troops, crews, etc.) develop a leader succession plan that includes naming the future leader months or years in advance. For a Venturing crew, this advisor-in-waiting would then be recognized to all members and volunteers of the unit that she or he is participating in and observing various advisor-specific functions for the purpose of preparing

her/himself for future responsibilities. But from my experience, I know that there are two issues that impede the benefits of volunteer leader succession planning with BSA units. The first issue is that circumstances exist where the methods and manners of the current leader are not suitable for modeling to the future leader, or in other words, a unit committee or chartering organization may not want the future leader to resemble, in any way, the current leader. At the same time, it would be difficult to tell the leader-in-waiting to observe another unit's skillful leader because you want the leader-in-waiting to know and understand the inner-workings and the people of the unit that s/he will work with. And the second issue is that sometimes volunteer leaders need to make abrupt departures due to circumstances related to their career, family, health, and the like. It is rare for BSA unit leaders to make their succession plan their first priority upon assuming their new role, especially when selecting a successor usually requires a degree of confidence that comes from a close relationship between the current and potential future leader. With this example, we can see that Helen was fortunate, and the beneficiary of relatively rare opportunities, when she was able to observe a skillful predecessor as well as her experienced, skillful husband.

Sophistication of Training

The participants' comments also raised some concerns about the sophistication of the training for crew advisors. The concerns led me to believe that some training was being delivered in an overly simplistic manner. Dom, for example, believes that the training process for crew advisors is too elementary in its depth. He felt as though the trainers routinely talked to trainees (e.g. crew advisors) like they were children rather than adult volunteers about to assume the crew advisor role. He believes that this simplicity inhibits the trainees' comprehension of their need to continually update and refresh their Venturing program to keep it contemporary and meaningful for the Venturers. Dom also sees a lack of praise and encouragement within the training process.

Trainees attend the VLST but are not energized by the process. This sets a bad precedent for those volunteers who then return to their Venturing crews without investing effort into motivating and encouraging the Venturers.

Along the same lines of advisors not receiving or perceiving the positive examples from their training experiences, Helen wishes there would be a second, supplemental training added to the training process of crew advisors. She believes that a series of training events, and not just one single set of training programs at the beginning, would provide a refresher for some of the skills that advisors may have forgotten. The “refresher training” could also keep them updated on the current policies and initiatives of the BSA that would affect the Venturing program. A “refresher training”, as Helen put it, would also be helpful because she believes that advisors know a lot of information from their life experience, but they should always be looking for ways to better say and express what it is that they know. Skillful trainers may be able to present the same information using a variety of explanations, and every new explanation may enable an advisor to better understand information on a topic, and hopefully improve the explanation they offer to others, especially their Venturers.

Improvements to the Training Content Regarding the Role of the Advisor

Improving the training process in the ways described in the previous section could aid in the preparation of Venturing crew advisors, but the training improvement aspect of this study had deeper interests in the improvement of the training content. In the introduction, I mentioned how the BSA’s training for Venturing crew advisors did not contain any learning objectives that supported the mission and vision of the BSA. This was identified as an “incongruence” and referred to the current trainings did not increase the probability that crew advisors would be successful in fulfilling the organization’s positive youth development mission and vision.

Providing an improved alignment between the learning objectives of the training and the mission and vision of the organization relies on the revision of the training content so that topics related to youth development and character building in young adults would make the organization's fulfillment of its mission and vision more intentional. Without prompts from me, participants identified two categories for improving the content of crew advisor training: improved understanding of the role of the crew advisor and additional skills and perspectives regarding crew management. The participants' suggestions for these two categories of improvements are described herein, with the role of the advisor addressed in this section, and crew management addressed in the next section.

Identity of the Advisor

I have summarized the participants' suggestions for training content improvement regarding the role of the advisor into three subcategories. This section discusses the identity of the advisor and subsequent sections discuss the advisor's readiness for personal growth and the advisor's readiness for coaching her/his Venturers.

First and foremost, participants mentioned that crew advisors needed to become comfortable with the definition of an "advisor" to the Venturing crew and its Venturers. Ralph was concerned that the current training did not make the limits of the crew advisor role explicit for new advisors. He said that an improved training syllabus,

...would somehow focus on the role of the advisor, and the word *advisor*, to help [the trainees] answer the question 'what does *advisor* mean?' When you are the advisor, you are not the top dog. People will come up to you [as the advisor], and you will need to keep deflecting them away and tell [the Venturers themselves] 'that's not my decision, that's your decision!', or [to tell parents or other adults] 'you've got to talk to the crew president, or a crew member.' I'm still trying to achieve [these skills as an advisor], and I'm not one-hundred percent successful.

Ralph is still learning the specific mindset of an advisor despite serving for nearly six years as crew advisor. This is a testament to the challenge that comes with an adult taking a supporting role, yielding to the leadership and decision-making of the Venturers of the crew. Wally's suggestion for helping adult volunteers yield to their Venturers' leadership is to "help advisors become aware of their own expectations for their crew, and help them understand how those expectations influence their interactions with their Venturers." An example that Wally provided was about the influence of an advisor's expectations of speed and efficiency when communicating with Venturers, particularly the crew president. Not only must "advisors... be willing to listen more than they talk" when advising their crew officers, but it is also "important to choose the appropriate time to communicate with the Venturers." Wally continued, saying that if an advisor asks a Venturer a number of tough questions one after another while s/he is standing in front of the entire crew, "they might not have enough experience to be able to answer those questions on their feet." Wally thought that when an advisor was made aware of her/his assumption that Venturers were capable of responding rapidly to tough questions, much like an advisor's adult coworker may be, the advisor could adjust her/his expectations to a level suitable for older teenagers. Wally said that when he realized that he held this type of expectation, he learned to hold off his questions until he could communicate in private with the crew president. For example, using e-mail he might write "I heard you talking about this tonight. This sounds like an interesting thing you're trying to get started. What are you doing with that, and where is that going?" Wally believes that ultimately, advisors "have got to be who they are" by being honest about their own strengths and the expectations they hold for others. An awareness of those characteristics will help an advisor work well with her/his crew's teenage Venturers.

Readiness for Personal Growth

An important concept that is missing from the VLST is that the learning process for crew advisors is just beginning at the time that they complete their basic training. In order to optimize their abilities to work with youth, and ultimately to maximize the positive development potential of the youth in their crews, crew advisors need to continually grow and develop beyond what they learned during their basic training. The participants described how they have personally continued to learn more about working with youth with each meeting or interaction with youth. They encouraged new advisors to learn as early as possible that they need to be ready to grow and learn well into the future of their work with their crews.

The simultaneous growth of Venturers and crew advisors was reflected in the participants' comments. Dom, the youngest participant, said, "Even in the last three years, they've grown up, and I've grown up, too." Ralph offered two specific examples of how his crew advisor experience has helped him develop beyond the context of Venturing (i.e. management skills at his company and parenting skills with his older children). Ralph said,

Delegation is something that I'm learning all over. I'm doing better with it. What's interesting is that being a crew advisor is helping me become a better manager, and being a manager helps me be a better advisor. They're transferrable skills, and they continue to grow.

And when I asked him whether advising a crew has affected his perspective on parenting, Ralph said,

Good question. My reflection on [parenting] has been that, particularly with my son, I could have done a better parenting job if I would have applied some of the skills that I apply with the crew. I was tougher on him. With the crew and working as an advisor, you're stepping back. You're not a parent of those kids. When you're parenting your kid, sometimes you create expectations or do things in a way that would be different. There are times, just through Scouts with my son and even now, that some of the skills I've learned through advising that I wish I had when my son was younger. I think [those skills] would have benefitted both of us.

Ralph's experience as an advisor appears to have made a significant impact on his life, or at least on his perspective of how he works with others.

When Pam speaks with, or trains, other adult volunteers in Venturing, she is particularly concerned with having them "lighten up." She tells them,

Grow with your Venturers, make the mistakes, have fun, make it your fun too. If the Venturers are not having fun, [Venturing] is not going to be their *thing*. If you're not having fun in Venturing, then try to find what will be fun for you.

Encouraging advisors to have fun with their crews is an important lesson to Pam because the gratification from seeing the results of the investment into each of the youth may come after a significant delay. The advisor may not have the opportunity to see the outcomes of their investment because the Venturer may be away at college or well into their next stage of life when they utilize and benefit from the skills they learned in Venturing. While describing the lessons learned by youth, particularly from the Venturing program, she said,

Everyone can get something out of [their experience with the Venturing program]. I can't name *what* each person is going to get out of it, but if you get something out of it, then I'm very happy about that. Because I also know, very much, that even if you take a sliver away from it today, that sliver grows and becomes an '*Ah-Ha*' moment that really becomes something that I may never know.

Wally expressed a similar experience. "The reality is that in over 30 years of [working with youth], the rewards come later on down the road. I realize that [their full understanding] doesn't happen right away," he said, referring to his experience as a youth minister and as a Venturing crew advisor.

The suggestion to include training that makes advisors ready for their own personal growth, along with being prepared to facilitate the growth of the Venturers, was aimed at preparing advisors for an ongoing education. The participants believed that it would not be possible for an adult volunteer to learn everything they needed to know about crew advisement and youth development after just one or two training sessions. Their true preparation will come

from what is ostensibly “on the job training” which is a part of their ongoing support of Venturers and other youth. By making new crew advisors aware of the continued development that they are likely to experience and by encouraging them to be open to the mistakes that they will make and the lessons they will learn from those mistakes, the training would provide a more authentic perspective of the typical experience of a crew advisor. This change in training would encourage advisors to continually seek new and better ways to work with youth and support a youth program that can captivate older adolescents.

Readiness for Coaching

The final aspect of the participants’ suggestions for improving the content of the crew advisor training with regard to the role of the advisor indicates the utilization of coaching skills while working with youth. Coaching is being suggested here as a specific style of interaction between the advisor and the youth. It is a style that implies that achievement rests on the abilities of the youth, and the advisor’s purpose is to support the youths’ development of those abilities. While advisors may need to utilize a variety of styles of interaction with their Venturers, a coaching style seemed to describe the sentiment of the participants.

Ralph frames his coaching of his Venturers as, “Help[ing] them develop a goal, and then help[ing] them develop the steps to achieve that goal.” He later provided additional context to make the picture of his coaching style as a crew advisor clearer. He discussed his responsibility to keep the Venturers safe while still ensuring their autonomy to plan and implement their activities:

In terms of being a stickler for rules, I can’t quote chapter and verse, but I can tell you that I follow closely the important aspects of the BSA rules. From a Venturing standpoint, young ladies are here [pointing in the distance], young men are here [pointing in the opposite direction into the distance]. When we went to Northern Tier [BSA canoe base], you’re not supposed to jump off of anything higher than 10 feet or something like that. I was told that I am a stickler by one of the other advisors, because I was following a structure.

But you create that structure, and within that structure you have a whole lot of latitude to work in. And so, the formality—to tie back quickly to the crew meetings—we don't have an opening, we don't say a prayer, we don't have a closing. But there is structure there, and at some point there is an opening, and at some point there is activity, and at some point there is a closing. It is not as firm or as hard of a structure, but its there.

In Ralph's frame of mine, he and his fellow adult volunteers establish the general structure of the crew in response to the continual feedback (and observation) of the Venturers in his crew. He sees the general structure of the crew's operations that he helps to establish as a method that allows him to stand more in the background and keep his figurative "hands" off of the crew's operations and decisions. With a structure in place, and the Venturers operating relatively freely within that structure, Ralph and the crew's other adult volunteers could focus on observing and developing the abilities of the Venturers so that they can accomplish their personal goals, and the goals they have helped establish for their crew.

Wally and Pam each described the focus they placed on being ready to respond to naturally occurring or "serendipitous" questions or occurrences that emerge suddenly within the crew's structure or operation. Wally's example came when his crew president asked all of the Venturers to begin the crew meeting by reciting the Venturing Oath. Just after the crew finished the Oath someone asked a question about the meaning behind one of the phrases of the Oath. This question led to a spontaneous group discussion, where Wally engaged for only a few moments to provide some background about the BSA to guide the dialogue. When I asked him whether he planned on this discussion about the values of Venturing in the Oath, he was quick to reply,

I don't think you can plan on it, it's just got to happen. There's a serendipity thing. If you've got some skillful questions you can ask, you can keep that going. It's not necessarily something that can be built into the program on a procedural basis, but it's more that we created an environment where that could happen, and when it does happen, we just hope that our advisors are prepared to respond. That is how I think advisors should function—over planning a meeting to discuss values or anything.

Pam also spoke of the same type of advisor readiness that Ralph and Wally addressed. Pam would describe Wally's situation with the spontaneous question about the meaning of the Venturing Oath as a "learnable moment", which she highly prizes within her crew's ongoing activities. While describing learnable moments, she said, "If the adults don't listen and help the naturally occurring events proceed, they may miss a lot of opportunities to help [the Venturers] make accomplishments."

The participants suggest that Venturing advisor training should be improved in part by helping new advisors understand the role that they play within the crew. Three aspects of an advisor's identity that were on the minds of the participants were the advisor's understanding of their identity within the crew, the advisor's readiness to grow and develop personally alongside their Venturers, and the advisor's readiness to coach Venturers to their own achievement. Improving advisors' comprehension of those three aspects of their own selves would help advisors be aware of the influence of their own attitude and actions upon their Venturers, and this self-awareness could reportedly play an important role in the success of a crew in terms of facilitating the positive development of their Venturers. However, a crew advisor also holds the primary responsibility for the health and safety of the youth as well as the duty to work with the crew's youth officers to prepare them to lead their peers. With these responsibilities, the advisor holds the primary responsibility for crew management. The participants identified this as the final emphasis area for improving the training of these adult volunteers. The difference between the current and the following suggested training emphasis (discussed in the next section) is that the current focus has been on the advisor's personal role in the crew while the following suggestions relate to the preparations necessary for helping the crew's youth become successful.

Improvements to the Training Content Regarding Crew Management

Crew advisors are a cloaked necessity to Venturing crews and the teens that they work with. Advisors need to put the youth first, to provide the youth with the opportunities to plan, organize, and implement activities and events with relative freedom, and to use the naturally occurring consequences, successes and failures, as opportunities to help youth learn without actually directly “teaching” them anything. Venturing, after all, is not school, and crew advisors are not the same as formal classroom teachers. Crew advisors do, however, assume many of the same duties as teachers, educators, and other caregivers to youth. A few examples include the assurance of safety and health, the mitigation of risk, the veracity and effectiveness of the educational program, and the spirit of fun and meaningfulness in the youths’ ongoing involvement with the program. While advisors need to be able as individuals to grow, learn, and improve themselves and their skills, they also need to be able to manage the operations of a gathering of young adults. Specifically, they need to be able to manage young adults who gather according to their own choosing and device without the advisor her/himself assuming a role in the foreground of the group. The participants made comments regarding the need to improve advisor training to provide new advisors with more background about crew management. Their comments can be synthesized into two distinct aspects of crew management: shared authority with youth and maintaining a practical stance toward with the implementation of Venturing program goals.

Shared Authority with Youth

The participants who talked with me were approached by me because they were identified by others or by me as being relatively successful with working with Venturers and the

Venturing program. Despite the tenure, success, and confidence about their role as an advisor, there was one dimension of their experience as advisors that still led them to be concerned, apprehensive, or downright skittish: acceptance by their crew's youth. The participants helped me understand that advisors face a substantial amount of uncertainty in their roles, despite the training, program guidelines and methods, and safety policies provided to them by the BSA. For starters, despite hope and best intention, the Venturers in the crew are independent and youthful, and their choices may not always correspond with what their adult advisors would hope for them to choose.

Pam has experienced some challenging situations with her Venturing crew. When I asked her about how confident she felt that she could provide for the needs of the youth in her crew, she had this to say:

I say a prayer every time I go to have a challenging conversation with a Venturer that I'm going to come through [it and survive]. I've had some majorly, majorly rocky roads. I've had a couple of girls who have had some behavior issues, and who would act up with [public displays of affection (PDA)] with the guys at these events. The crew would complain about [the PDA]. The other advisors and I would sit down with them, and the girls would lash back. One of those girls was someone who had to fight, fight, fight!

I knew I needed to set a positive tone with those girls [in the crew]. Doing that was not second nature for me at every step of the way. I've made mistakes. I'd think about what happened [in the challenging conversations] after the fact, and I'd think of ways to do things better than what I did.

Despite these challenging conversations, which came up with each of her Venturers in one type of situation or another throughout her time working with each of them, she has maintained a close connection with her Venturers, particularly as those Venturers grew older, and went to college. It was challenging at the time, but it turned out well in the end.

Other participants described apprehensions about being accepted by the Venturers, particularly when they first became the advisor of their crew. Helen expressed a number of wishes that she had for her relationship with her Venturers when she first began as the advisor,

wishes that exist today to an extent. She said, “I hope that they respect me. I hope that they like me. I hope that they know that I’ll pretty much do whatever they want, and if I say ‘no’, or ‘don’t’, or ‘we can’t’, then there’s a reason why I say that.” Dom, as a youth, also spent a number of years as a youth member of Venturing and in the BSA, and he also felt some apprehension when he first became the crew advisor. This apprehension was not due to doubts about skills or knowledge, but about how he would be perceived by the Venturers.

I wasn’t worried about being unprepared. My initial reaction was, ‘Ugh! Are these guys going to accept me?’ Because I’m so much younger [than the typical crew advisor], they might try to walk all over me. When you’re only six to ten years older than these guys, and you’re their leader, it’s a different role [than being the similar-age peer of the Venturers].

The apprehensions perceived by the participants underscore the dynamics of authority that exist within a Venturing crew. Unlike schools or other community programs where the eldest person in the room has the designated authority, the Venturing program provides youth with the opportunity to be in charge of themselves, which is foreign territory for many adults (and even some youth). While leadership needs to be in the hands of the youth, authority needs to be shared between the youth members and adult volunteers of the crew. It seems that the success of the Venturing program relies on this shared authority between Venturers and advisors within Venturing crews. A closer look reveals that the key to success at sharing authority within a Venturing crew relies on flexibility.

“You have to be really flexible,” Helen claimed while we discussed lessons she has learned. that she wants to pass onto other advisors. The schedule of Helen’s crew, and the crew’s officers, offers a clear example. “The lives of youth change at the last minute quite often with school events and their other activities. These things happen, especially when they are in high school. Thinking ahead one year is really hard. As much as we’d love to plan that far ahead, we don’t have any control over it.” Ralph has adapted to his Venturers’ ever-changing schedules, but he admitted, “There’s a little bit of frustration on my part because I’m trying to get [the

Venturers] to think ahead.” Both Helen and Ralph came to the conclusion that regardless of the hopes and best efforts of crew advisors, the Venturers are usually able to think ahead about three to six months from the present. Ralph, Helen, and other participants usually try to have their crews create a rough activity plan for the upcoming program year (that follows the school year calendar). But attempts to treat that program plan as a literal and concrete plan are often met with roadblocks from the Venturers’ schedules across all aspects of their lives. After Ralph’s six years of experience, he said when I interviewed him in the month of March, “Our crew typically hasn’t gotten their act together until about now to look at what’s going on this summer.... If we’ve gotten a couple of them to start thinking about what we’re going to do next summer, I think we’ve made a good step [forward].”

The same flexibility that advisors need to have in order to work with the schedules of the Venturers is also necessary when trying to work with the Venturers themselves. Helen wishes that she had more time to work individually with the members of the crew, particularly, her crew president and the other crew officers. If everyone’s schedules would align and cooperate, Helen would prefer to coach these Venturers in a calmer setting away from the typical crew meeting, where she could talk,

...More about what each officer’s responsibility is to the rest of the crew. [And] a lot more of the practical planning. Giving kids a checklist without explaining it isn’t as useful. They will make a paper airplane from the list. [Also] the practical things that go into planning a trip.

There’s a lot of leadership stuff, like knowing your resources, listening, communicating, problem solving, dealing with adults—I would do that with small groups, not the whole [crew]. I would like to talk with them about these things, especially the officers [because] they are supposed to be doing this kind of stuff [for the crew].

I reported earlier that at the time we talked, Helen had not been able to coordinate all of the schedules in the previous three weeks for a monthly crew officers’ meeting. Her best intentions for the benefit of the youth may be thwarted, but her resolve was not. The conversations with the

participants indicated that flexibility has allowed them to successfully share authority with the Venturers. Furthermore, flexibility has to allow the Venturers to have the autonomy they need in order to have their own experiences. Venturers also experience the consequences of their actions with supportive advisors only stepping in when necessary.

The dialogue with the participants has shown me one other aspect of crew management that should be addressed in crew advisor training—an aspect that I believe allowed crew advisors to be flexible in their shared authority with their crew's youth: a sense of practicality when interpreting the goals and implementing the methods of the Venturing program.

Practical Implementation of Program Methods

There is a marked difference between local laws and organizational policies that mandate procedures for preserving the safety, health, and well-being of youth, and the goal and method statements of a youth program that guide the program experience and its intended outcomes by describing the ways and means for delivering the experience to achieve the outcomes. In other words, laws and policies must be followed precisely, while goals and methods can be interpreted and adapted according to the situation. Successful Venturing crew advisors appear to have a clear sense of the difference in circumstances that warrant strict observation (i.e. laws and policies) and circumstances that allow for individualized interpretation and practical application (i.e. the goals and methods of the Venturing program). When training crew advisors about crew management, helping them learn apply the aims and mission of the BSA in a way that is specific, beneficial, and meaningful to each Venturer would prepare advisors for facilitating positive development in the youth of their crews.

In line with the adage attributed to Aristotle that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts,” a Venturing crew's personality is more than that of only an advisor, a crew president, or

another dominant personality in the group. According to Wally's experience, the crew's needs and interests change as the combination of Venturers change from one activity to another. This was an important topic during our discussion because Wally described how he had learned to not make assumptions from one year to the next, or one activity to the next, and he had learned that past performance is not a reliable predictor of future outcomes. While the Venturing program has a defined set of methods for guiding the delivery of the program, the advisor needs to use her/his judgment on a case-by-case basis about what methods to apply. Furthermore, he or she should not let the expectations of a routine drive his or her to approach to working with the Venturers and crew. Pam said, "[The Venturing program is] not one-size-fits-all. One size doesn't suit all situations." She continued, "I think everybody has to grow, or do what they do with this program how it fits them. That's what it is about this program, it has to fit what works for you where you are."

Ralph's experience coincides with Pam's when it came to his crew's programming schedule. He said that earlier in his tenure as a crew advisor, he wanted to have a consistently active program and activity schedule with his crew like the schedules he had observed in the Boy Scout troop. This ambition, however, brought about a few disappointing crew events in a row, and he realized that he needed to change his perspective. When I asked him to explain how he overcame those disappointments, he said that the crew stopped trying to impose an activity schedule onto the already busy lives of the high schoolers in his crew. "Originally we tried to do a trip per month, and that didn't work. Now we try to plan [crew activities] according to the clockwork of the crew," he explained. *The clockwork of the crew* was quite telling from my perspective in that it acknowledged that when it came to the lives of the Venturers, an advisor should not expect that the crew and its activities would always take priority over the other facets of the youths' lives. The youth who come to the crew's meetings and activities want to be

involved, but they cannot be expected to be involved to the exclusion of their other activities and obligations.

It also turns out that one of the core tenets of the Venturing program, the youth-centeredness of crew leadership, is also subject to varied degrees of advisor support and involvement. All of the participants believe that the Venturers should have the opportunity to lead themselves and to make their own decisions with full support and encouragement from all of the adult volunteers. But at the same time, they readily admit that there have been times when they have intervened or assumed decision-making duties or planning processes typically reserved for the Venturers. Those advisors intervened in order to preserve what they believed to be the spirit of the program and for the greater good of the crew.

Ralph, Helen, Pam, and Wally each described times in the recent past when they needed to induce some element of progress into the Venturers' activity planning that had stalled. Earlier you read Ralph's statement that he would not "let a summer high adventure trip fall through the cracks" in the same way that he might let a smaller scale and less complicated crew activity fall through the cracks. Given summer high adventure trips require more involved planning with time-sensitive benchmarks, Ralph's point was that he has directly intervened in the trip planning. For example, if the Venturers lagged behind on important benchmarks, such as payment and reservation deadlines. For him and other study participants, this type of intervention was not needed on a permanent or long-term basis but became necessary if crew planning benchmarks fell at a time when the Venturers were swamped with other obligations (e.g. exams, playoff games).

Previously I presented advisors' commentaries regarding the lengthy deliberation and decision-making processes that they witnessed with their crews—something that each of them felt was an important experience for the Venturers, but was admittedly energy consuming for everyone involved. Helen said that there were busy times in her Venturers' lives when she did not feel that having the Venturers invest their time in making a decision about an activity was

productive. Instead, she offered them a more productive alternative: provide them with a list of options, let them choose one option, and have the Venturers spend their time deciding the details of the specific trip. Helen said that based on her experience, “I bring [the crew] a list of activities for them to choose from, because we just don’t have much time. I think I know what they like, so I put together a list.” That list narrows the range of options, focuses the Venturers’ attention on a choice from a set of options, and keeps the youth active and engaged while still preserving the youth-centeredness of the crew’s leadership. Wally has used the same methods with his crew, and he explained that in his career working with youth, “There are always things that [adult advisors] want the youth to accomplish. You can direct them by giving them choices.” One of Wally’s strategies was revealed to me during a later interview when he described how he uses the BSA’s “Activity Interest Survey” (Boy Scouts of America, 1998b) to prompt the Venturers, at the beginning of the program year, to write out their own personal interests for activities and program ideas for the crew to pursue. Then, when the crew needs an activity idea quickly, he pulls out from his files the Venturers’ surveys, and has them make a decision from the list of options that they had previously generated. In a similar discussion that I had with Pam, she said, “The youth do the planning, but sometimes the adults need to spark it.”

Subtle interventions into the crew’s operations may also be important for the Venturers and the crew to fulfill other needs based on the advisors’ personal interests, the goals of the Venturing program, or even the policies of the BSA. For example, the advisors’ ongoing attention to the health and safety of the crew members means that s/he may need to suggest or require alternative ways for the Venturers to carry out their activity plans. Ralph mentioned a time when, during a crew canoe trip in the summertime, he had to prevent the Venturers who wanted to swim in a lake from jumping off of any rocks that stood higher than ten feet from the water surface because of the BSA’s swimming safety policy. The Venturers cooperated, begrudgingly, after he

told everyone about that rule and the importance of following it, but one of the other accompanying adults later called Ralph “a stickler for the rules”.

On a slightly less dire issue, advisors may also need to focus on a macro-level perspective of the crew’s program, and intervene with regard to specific activities. Pam said that even though her crew had defined its interest area to be outdoor high adventure, it was important to her and the other adult volunteers that the crew’s program be “balanced”. She identified for me the particular types of activities that she wants to have present somewhere in the course of her crew’s annual program plan, such as “adventure, athletics, citizenship, social, service, et cetera.” Pam indicated that even if the Venturers did not think of activities for each of those activity categories, she might find and suggest some options that could fit those categories. For example, she may suggest that the Venturers perform as the color guard (presenting the American flag) at a community ceremony or conduct a service project for a local children’s hospital. Wally also mentioned a practical intervention he implemented with youth: he planned three different hikes with varying difficulty levels to happen simultaneously during the same trip. The novices in the outdoors were grouped together and then went on a less challenging hike, and the more experienced members were grouped together and sent on more challenging hikes. In that case, all of the youth went hiking like they had decided, but Wally made sure that the level of challenge appropriately matched the level of ability to help ensure that everyone had fun and that no safety issues arose during their trip.

The sense of practicality inherent in the perspectives of the participants reflects some of my personal observations from my involvement with Venturing and the BSA in general. Essentially, there are all types of personalities who become adult volunteers in the BSA. Some people interpret printed BSA guidelines and other literature with a literal and immovable stance. Those literalists say that advisors must never utter a word to the Venturers, and that they must keep their (figurative) hands out of the business of the crew. Other personalities are unable to

grasp the youth centeredness of the leadership and decision-making of a Venturing crew, and they more or less run the crew as if it was for the younger members of a Cub Scout pack, Girl Scout troop, or Boy Scout troop. Readers should notice that none of those literalist or controlling personalities are represented in the sample of participants for this study, and the participants were chosen based on observations of these advisors in action with their youth made by others or myself. While the goals and methods of Venturing should be known and implemented to the degree possible, a crew advisor will often be faced with decisions between options that pit against each other the short-term and the long-term benefits. When these types of decisions arose for the participants, they often relied on their relationships with their Venturers, and their understanding of the expectations of the program. They did their best to find practical solutions that did not undermine any demands for health and safety, youth leadership experience, or the desirable long-term outcomes for youth who have experienced the Venturing program.

Summary

This chapter described improvements that could be made to the basic training of adult volunteers who would like to work with youth, particularly new advisors of Venturing crews. The training improvements were synthesized from the discussions I had with the participants who represented successful crew advisors. Their responses were obtained during three-interview series with a total of nearly five hours of discussion time each. I consider the participants' experiences to be an important source of insight into the practical knowledge needs. That is, needs that are useful for preparing adult volunteers to be successful at leading groups of youth from the perspective of positive youth development.

The suggested improvements do not reduce the training. In fact, they push the training to become more advanced, complex, and related to the desired outcomes for youth held by the

Venturing program. The dialogue with the advisors offers the perspective that while they may not all be youth development professionals, they are far from simplistic in their thinking about facilitating youth development. Furthermore, the suggested improvements to the training process and content build upon the capabilities of successful advisors that I described in Chapter 6. In order to focus on the abilities mentioned in this chapter, an advisor would need to have a productive relationship and a sense of intentionality about the experience that they hope to deliver to the youth in their Venturing crew.

The training improvements suggested in this chapter identify specific skills that may not be learned simply by being told a trainer's opinion. Rather they may need to be coached through their experience as an advisor in a similar manner to how successful advisors coach their own Venturers' skill development process. While improving the training content is important to me for fulfilling the aspirations I presented in Chapter 5, the training process for adult volunteers with youth cannot be rendered secondary. Their suggestions amount to a wholesale reconceptualization of what new Venturing crew advisors learn and how they learn it.

The current chapter represents an opportunity for advisor training to be improved based on the experiences of actual advisors. The next chapter represents an opportunity for advisor training to be improved through the introduction of an outside resource, the *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents*, from recent advances in research and understanding of positive youth development. In essence, the next chapter describes what I learned when the study participants briefly worked with a tool that I believed could be valuable to crew advisor training. Their comments helped me consider the value of outside resources introduced to a typically self-sustaining organization like the BSA.

Chapter 8

Integrating Outside Resources into the BSA Modus Operandi

The third and final research question of this study explores the participants' perceived value of outside resources related to youth development that could be introduced to improve the training of adult volunteers who work with youth. This topic sparked my interest for a couple of reasons. I see the need for adult volunteers who are working with older adolescents in Venturing to receive a relatively thorough introduction to characteristics that describe youth of that age. Also, resources highlight the benefits that a youth development program like Venturing could provide to young people that could positively affect the future contributions that they could offer to society. The existing VLST for adult volunteers supporting Venturing crews does not include any research-supported information about the development of adolescents or about implementing programs that prepare those young adults for their next stages of life. Thus, the goal for this set of interview questions with the participants was to assess crew advisors' readiness to learn and utilize information sourced from outside the BSA, and scholarly information custom "packaged" to the needs of crew advisors.

While I have an appreciation for an easy-to-read research-based theory, like the theory of positive youth development (Benson, et al., 2006), I assumed that adult volunteers who work with youth generally might not share the same appreciation about a scholarly theory written in a book or journal article. Instead of focusing on a theory, I needed a youth development topic that would be immediately useful to the study participants, the average crew advisor. The *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents* (Search Institute, 2006), a resource developed from research investigating the factors in the lives of young adults who contribute to society, aligned with my goal because it

imparts the principles of positive youth development while not delving into the minutiae of the theory. Its relevance to Venturing age youth was immediately recognizable.

The interview process associated with this research question differed slightly from the process used with the previous two research questions. During interviews one and two the participants and I discussed their personal and professional background, their experience as a crew advisor to date, and their perspectives on a variety of issues facing crew advisors and the training of crew advisors. At the end of interview two, the participants were provided with a copy of the Search Institute's one-page 40 Assets document (see Appendix A) and a brief background description of the Search Institute and its research that formed the basis for the 40 Assets. Then I asked each participant to spend at least fifteen minutes reviewing the sheet sometime before our third interview. Specifically, they were asked to mark or highlight each of the developmental assets they believed to have been addressed in some way by the Venturing program experience provided to their crew's youth. At the third interview, we discussed how the 40 Assets played out in their crews (if at all). We discussed their thoughts on the benefits and usefulness of the 40 Assets (if any) as well as follow-up questions to statements they made in previous interviews. The participants saw the 40 Assets as valuable to crew advisors as a tool for reflection about the intentionality of their crew's program. They relayed their personal thoughts about the possibilities they imagined for integrating the 40 Assets into crew advisor training efforts. Both of these points will be described in detail in the next sections of this chapter.

40 Assets as a Tool for Crew Advisor Reflection

The "experimental" nature of using the 40 Assets with the participants manifests in two ways: the use of the 40 Assets document as a prompt for advisors to informally analyze their youth program and the introduction of the 40 Assets as an outside resource to youth-serving

leaders of the BSA. These two experimental points were noteworthy because I was knowingly using the 40 Assets document in a way for which it was not designed. I described the document to the participants as a product of extensive research and scholarship so that it was clear that this was not a BSA resource and that the BSA was not a part of its creation. My goal was to see whether this resource would be seen as being useful to adult volunteers serving as crew advisors, and what potential uses, if any, the participants would indicate for the 40 Assets within the Venturing program. My dialogue with the participants leads me to believe that the 40 Assets could serve a few important purposes for adult volunteers working with youth programs. The first purpose is promoting reflection in program leaders.

Wally captured an interesting perspective on the value of the 40 Assets for crew advisors, based on the idea that adult volunteers with the BSA come from a broad range of personal, educational, and professional backgrounds. He said that the 40 Assets can help prompt adult volunteers to consider issues about youth development that they may not have personal knowledge about. When I asked Wally about the utility he saw in the 40 Assets for crew advisors, he said,

I think [knowing about the 40 Assets] would have benefit. I'm not sure everyone thinks about these things. If [an advisor is] an engineer [by trade] and he wants to get out with a [youth] group and [be an advisor]—he probably hasn't had a lot of time [studying] psych, or he's not thought about how this stuff fits in. I think this is good stuff for advisors to think about. ...As much as I say the kids run the [crew], we as advisors have a lot to think about. Have the advisors thought about 'doing this with that', or if he gives them six things to choose from, and he's already guided them to where he hopes they'll go.

I think that, like *positive peer influence* [on the 40 Assets document]—with a lot of these [Assets] advisors need to think about how you advise, what would he do to make [some of the assets] happen in his group? ...Being aware of these things [on the 40 Assets document]—this is great for people who may not think about this kind of stuff.

Wally's thoughts frame the 40 Assets as a briefing about youth development for adult volunteers who are motivated to serve as the best crew advisors they could be. Wally projected his

interpretation onto the perspective of other crew advisors he observed in the past, but Ralph spoke personally regarding his own opinion of the 40 Assets,

...After I read the list, I looked at it. I had a lot of checkmarks on internal assets versus external assets. It made me reflect, and think about, is there something I could be doing more on the external assets side, is there something there that maybe I could be developing more. So, I took the opportunity to use this as a self-reflection tool, because this is through my eyes, and so it's a chance to mirror and look back and see things that I think I can grow in, or that I can help the youth program.... It was good for some self-reflection, and it had me thinking about a number of things overall.

Ralph's review of the 40 Assets and personal assessment of his crew's program caused him to think critically about the context of his crew and his role in facilitating the development of the crew's youth members. This was possible because of Ralph's six years of involvement with his crew. He has a sizeable base of experience with the Venturing program and his crew's youth members. Ralph's response to my questions about the 40 Assets document provided a glimpse at what he could do with that information in order to improve the support his crew offers for the positive development of youth. Similar to Ralph, Dom also found the 40 Assets to be a spark for reflection on the benefits his crew provides to youth, as well as the benefits provided by the other aspects of youths' lives, when he said,

I really liked it, and I found it to be very useful. As I was going through this, I saw some of the assets and thought, 'Well, no, we really don't do this too well. Maybe we should. Maybe that is something that we could incorporate into our crew.' For example, when I'm sitting one-on-one with a youth during a crew advisor conference, I could ask questions related to some of [the assets]—like with their education, or other important points.

Helen's reply offered a glimpse of her personal thought process after reading the list. She said, "I never really thought about *personal power*, *self-esteem*, and *sense of purpose* as distinct concerns, but when I saw them on this list, it helped me see that they are separate, and each could be achieved individually." She, too, has some particular thoughts brewing about relatively small ways that the Venturing program, and her crew in particular, can impact the growth of the Venturers. For example, while talking about the *positive family communication* asset, she realized

that the positive development for the Venturers is not just what the crew provides directly to the youth but also the growth that the crew and its activities spurred indirectly for the youth and their families such as,

When crew events conflict with family plans, the youth and their family need to discuss [the schedule conflict] together and make a decision. We tell the Venturers that the crew's activities should not supersede their family.... I also make sure that I never e-mail the youth without also copying one of the parents. I think that not only is this a youth protection thing, but it also encourages the family to communicate together.

In terms of prompting reflection, or an informal analysis, of the benefits provided to Venturers by the crew program, the 40 Assets document helped focus advisors' thoughts about the group of youth and the program that they know very well. Stated differently, the 40 Assets document helped the advisors to look beyond their own comfortable conceptualization of their delivery of the program in order to consider it from a perspective that is not discussed widely in the BSA. By prompting crew advisors to reflect on the youth development prospects for their crew's operations, an opportunity emerges for expanding the Venturing program's focus away from being merely, as Pam called it previously, a "program for youth".

Suggestions for Integrating the 40 Assets into Crew Advisor Training

Given that the purpose of introducing the 40 Assets to the participants was to explore whether crew advisors would be open to working with a scholarly resource produced by an entity outside of the BSA, the comments presented in the previous section offered an affirmation. The 40 Assets document prompted meaningful reflection in the participants regarding the growth and development of the youth in their Venturing crews. I also received some meaningful suggestions from the participants regarding possible methods for integrating the 40 Assets into the training or development of crew advisors.

Pam suggested that the 40 Assets be used to diagram, or otherwise explain, the goals and benefits that are inherent in the Venturing program's general methods and activities. She said,

One thing would simply be to identify that these skills could result from the activities that we have in Venturing. I think of some people as surface thinkers, who take our skills and our program at face value. They might not see the benefits that we deliver, and [the 40 Assets] could show them some of the benefits.

Pam's suggestion relates to utilizing the 40 Assets in ways that can support the positive development of individual youth in the crew. With the help of the 40 Assets, she would be able to clearly explain to parents and fellow leaders of her crew the specific needs of individual Venturers. She would also be able to explain the crew's activities, as well as the Venturing program's methods, in terms of developmental assets. Using the assets in this way could create a universal language, so that even if someone does not understand the Venturing program, they would be able to understand the program's outcomes. Essentially, she would be able to "diagram" the Venturing program in terms of the 40 Assets. Whether or not Pam's suggestion is implemented, worksheets with "diagrams" that link particular assets with particular functions in the crew could be provided to trainees so that they could see how the crew's program links to particular developmental assets.

Pam's suggested use for the 40 Assets in training advisors could serve to make them aware of the effect that Venturing could have on the lives of youth. Dom's suggestion aimed to use the 40 Assets as a potential planning tool for the advisors. Dom's reply to my question about how he would suggest the 40 Assets to be used for advisor training was,

In my personal opinion, I wouldn't use it during a [Venturing Leader Specific Training], but as a supplemental training. Like after you've finished your basic trainings, but before advanced trainings like Wood Badge or Powder Horn. It can be a group evaluation and personal evaluation opportunity. You could easily take the 40 Assets and modify them, turn them into questions, and say [to the trainees] 'this questionnaire will help you realize where you are with your crew'. This is a good way to help advisors know where they want to go with their crews. This would help them get onto a path, and help them direct their crew.

Dom considered a supplemental training more fitting for introducing the 40 Assets for two practical reasons. The first reason related to time, in that he saw the existing basic training (five to six hours) as almost being too long, and he did not want to add more to it at the risk of making it longer. And his second reason was similar to a point I described earlier in that he believed that crew advisors needed to have a moderate amount of background with the crew and its Venturers in order for them to reflect on the 40 Assets in a knowledgeable and meaningful manner.

Lastly, Wally considered the 40 Assets to be a crew's goal state that advisors could strive for—a goal state that could be presented and explained during the advisor trainings. He noted that, "...the external assets that are listed on there are things that they all get certain parts to various extents. I'd like to think that by the time the crew is functioning where I think it ought to, [the Venturers] will be getting all of those things. That's what I'd like to think." Creating an optimal and ideal crew in terms of the 40 Developmental Assets would certainly be a hypothetical exercise, but it could serve as a visual aid to help crew advisors create a vision for what they hope their own crews could look like in the future.

Summary

Throughout this study, my interest in crew advisors' "intentionality" could be summarized by writing that it would be good for advisors to think about their Venturers putting on a good program for the youth, but it would be much better if advisors thought about the character growth and personal development of their Venturers and then modified their crew program accordingly. As you have read earlier in this document, my goal is to increase the occurrence of positive youth development in youth-serving organizations like the BSA to a probability better than chance. The likelihood of such a transition in the Venturing program hinges on the level of responsibility that the adult volunteers are willing to assume. If a tool like

the 40 Assets could be used to heighten crew advisors' awareness of the potential youth development outcomes available in the Venturing program, then they could be more likely to guide their crews in ways that intentionally foster the development of Venturers according to the observed strengths and weaknesses of each youth member. The participants' replies to my interview questions showed me that the 40 Assets can serve as an initial prompt for advisors' intentionality for developing youth through the experiences of the crew. There were also some viable connections suggested by the participants regarding how the 40 Assets could be introduced into an adult volunteer training setting.

At the heart of this component was the question regarding the introduction of outside resources to typical adult volunteers in the Venturing program in light of the fact that few notable outside resources exist in the current version of the Venturing Leader Specific Training. The results of this inquiry found that the 40 Assets document was well received by the study participants. The question about outside resources, and about the 40 Assets in particular, deserves further exploration. Their comments regarding the utility that the 40 Assets and the potential training benefits they identified indicate that a resource developed outside the BSA can be introduced to crew advisors. That is, if the resource is provided with context about its relevance to their role as crew advisors and as facilitators of the personal growth and development of the young adults in their crew.

Chapter 9

Application of the Study Findings to Make Their Journey Better

There is an ethical obligation that separates the worlds of academic research and marketing research that allows studies involving the effort and time of human research participants to actually serve as benevolent contributions toward the greater good. That obligation implies that data is best uncollected from participants unless the researcher intends to use them in a manner that helps that participant or other people in the participant's society. Chapters 6 through 8 have offered a metaphorical treasure trove of authentic information related to adult volunteers serving youth as Venturing crew advisors. I heard their perspectives and their perceptions, talked with them about their own "insider's view" of how future crew advisor preparation could be enhanced, and learned their opinions about bringing resources into the organization from outside entities. This chapter discusses the possibilities for using what I learned in a manner that would generally help adult volunteers better facilitate the positive development of older adolescent members of youth programs, and in ways that would help achieve my aspirations described in Chapter 5.

Advisor Capabilities

The interviews with the participants exposed me to a variety of ideas and details regarding the responsibilities and challenges that adult volunteers face when advising a group of young adults in the Venturing program. My analysis produced four capabilities that appear to have developed in relatively successful Venturing crew advisors. I labeled the four capabilities as the capabilities to:

- 1.) build productive interpersonal relationships with youth,
- 2.) intentionally facilitate youth development,
- 3.) utilize activity planning for youth development, and
- 4.) implement different leadership approaches for youth and other adults.

Within each of the first two capabilities were specific attributes (or skills) that described and clarified the frame and scope of those capabilities. While no claims could be made that the capabilities represent an exhaustive list of all of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that would be required of an ideal crew advisor, the capabilities do present a list of trainable skills that could be developed within new adult volunteers working in Venturing crews.

Even at this early stage of development, the capabilities have a significant utility for administrators, evaluators, and other stakeholders of youth development programs. First, the capabilities serve to heighten program stakeholders' and potential volunteers' awareness of the range of knowledge, skills, and abilities that allow an adult volunteer to be successful as an advisor of older youth. Although the capabilities represent abstract characteristics of people, they could help to narrow the field among a set of volunteers who each seek the role as the primary leader of a youth group. Also they could help identify opportunities for personal growth and development among self-directed adult volunteers. Along the same line as personal growth, program administrators who develop and deliver volunteer trainings could use the capabilities to target and prioritize particular skill sets within their volunteers in order to optimize their resources and their credibility with their stakeholders. Administrators who become aware of specific deficiencies or weaknesses in one or more of the capabilities (or their subordinate skills) could develop timely and relevant training content suited for particular audiences of volunteers. Lastly, the capabilities could be useful for preliminary and nonbinding evaluations of crews or crew advisors. The capabilities could provide some indicators of the level of preparation individuals may have for serving as the primary adult working with a group of youth or provide insight into

the degree of “fit” between a potential adult volunteer and the group of youth and families involved with the program.

The capabilities of relatively successful Venturing crew advisors are also important to this study because they bring context to the other research questions of the study that focused on the source of potential training resources and the processes by which those potential training resources are delivered. The BSA is just one of many youth organizations in the USA seeking to make the journeys of youth better as they grow and confront the challenges of adolescence. An observer could logically infer that resources addressing the training and enhancement of these capabilities may already exist and that resources that have been through a few iterations of development could jumpstart the training and preparation of adult volunteers. If the youth program is not providing training in the skills that volunteers need to help the organization achieve the mission and vision it has for its programs, then from an instructional design standpoint, there is a need to evaluate the process and the content of the program’s existing trainings. The following two sections will suggest potential applications of this study’s findings with regard to the outside resources and the training process that could support the development of the capabilities in adult volunteers.

Adult Volunteers’ Value of Outside Resources

Prior to the third interview, the participants were asked to work with a resource that was produced by an organization other than the BSA. The third interview explored the participants’ thoughts about the utility of the resource. To test the participants’ interest and willingness to use resources that did not originate within the BSA, but were produced through scholarly research, the one-page summary of the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents produced by the Search Institute (2006). The 40 Assets document was well-received by the participants as they found it

useful for prompting reflection about the program they deliver in their crews. Also, the 40 Assets triggered prospective thoughts regarding their interactions with their crew's youth members. The inquiry was simple and affirmed the basic premise that adult volunteers in the BSA would be willing to use and leverage resources from outside of the BSA if they could see the relevance and potential benefits of the resource in relation to their work as a volunteer.

The positive response from the participants implies that outside resources could be introduced to adult volunteers for the purposes of improving their knowledge and skills and to provide them with tools that could make them more effective at their roles. Knowing that there is at least an initial willingness to use and learn from outside resources, there is great potential for the rapid, efficient, and effective training and development of adult volunteers. The potential use of outside resources is important given that the capabilities of relatively successful advisors, as synthesized from the data collected in this study, are not addressed by the existing training curriculum for Venturing crew advisors. Ostensibly, we could consider these suggested revisions of crew advisor training as a hypothetical exercise to redesign the components of the basic training for adult volunteers who choose to work with older adolescents in the Venturing program.

If the basic trainings for crew advisors could be redesigned in order to develop the capabilities suggested by this study for adult volunteers, there would be a two-pronged approach. Coincidentally, the two prongs that I suggest align closely with two of the research questions in this research: the introduction of outside resources to support and enhance the development of adult volunteers working with older adolescents and suggestions related to the improvement of the content and process of the basic training for crew advisors. There are existing training resources that address significant portions of the capabilities identified by this study. I will briefly describe the resources are and how they can help adult volunteers working with older adolescents a range of educational youth programs. Next, participant suggestions about how to improve the

existing training will be presented as program-specific skills that will need to be delivered by skilled Venturing program trainers in local councils across the country. In sum, there are four areas of content revision or supplementation that I will propose—three are preexisting resources from other organizations and one is a retooling of the trainings that the BSA could develop and deliver.

Strategic Partnerships for Effective Training of Adult Volunteers

There would be more benefit for an organization, such as the BSA, to partner with other youth-oriented organizations. Through this partnership, the organizations could utilize their expertise and resources and avoid development of duplicate, existing resources. Since I proposed earlier in this report that the BSA is not currently framed as a youth development program, but is actually more of a program delivery service, then it would be unrealistic to expect that the BSA would have the existing expertise and resources to develop a training that would provide adult volunteers with the skills that they would need to facilitate the positive development of youth. Furthermore, the incongruence between the BSA's mission and vision and the knowledge and skills provided by the training curriculum of Venturing lends additional support to partnering with an outside organization. Specifically, if the BSA were genuinely interested in preparing adult volunteers for youth development tasks, the most effective course of action would involve strategic partnerships with providers of resources that satisfy a large portion of the capabilities identified by this study.

Based on my research, background, and personal experience, there are three training programs that focus on three distinct sets of skills. These skill sets were developed by three substantial and reputable organizations and could be packaged together to effectively prepare adult volunteers serving in youth-focused programs that promote positive youth development. I

have suggested these training programs because they are well designed, publicly accessible (usually with a reasonable cost), and would fit well with the volunteer culture of the BSA. Individually, the training programs do not serve a single capability as defined in this study. Rather, the combination of the three recommended trainings will serve to address the capabilities of successful adult volunteers that were proposed by this study.

The first training program recommended for adult volunteers working with older adolescents comes from the Search Institute (SI; an independent nonprofit organization)⁸ and focuses on the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents. For a fee, the SI provides a number of packaged and custom-designed trainings for youth-focused volunteers and professionals. While a youth organization like the BSA would want to forge a strategic partnership to assure the widespread scheduled delivery of a 40 Assets training at a low cost to volunteers, an existing training from the SI that serves as a proof-of-concept for the purposes of this report is titled “More Than Just a Place to Go: Using Developmental Assets to Strengthen Your Program” (The Search Institute, 2010). This training targets teams or individuals working in out-of-school programming for youth. The aims of the training are to familiarize trainees with the 40 Assets, to suggest methods for higher-quality program planning and assessment, and to support the review of a program to assess which assets are addressed and which could be more intentionally infused into a local youth program (The Search Institute, 2010). In reference to the capabilities supported by the results in my study, this training would provide adult volunteers with strategies for building productive interpersonal relationships and provide a basis for the intentionality of youth development.

If we consider the 40 Assets training to provide adult volunteers with a foundation in the theory or philosophy of youth development, then the second training that focuses on *interpretation* provides them with a voice that they could use to interact with the youth of their program. Interpretation is defined as a method for communicating in a manner that the audience

would consider pleasurable, relevant, organized, and pertinent to an identifiable theme, all of which is intended to help others learn (Ham, 1992). This is the communication method used by park rangers, art tour guides, history discussants and others who explain ideas to the general public to help a diverse audience develop an understanding or appreciation for the topic being interpreted. Interpretation differs from the typical method that classroom teachers use as it focuses on communicating to noncaptive audiences who could choose to move on from the presentation at any time they please (Ham, 1992). In light of the four capabilities supported by the current study, interpretation skills could help adult volunteers to develop a method for “teaching” skills to youth leaders and youth in general while helping the adult volunteers develop a separate leadership approach between youth and other adults in the program.

The National Association for Interpretation⁹ (NAI) is the leading organization for preparing and certifying interpretation professionals and volunteers around the world. The NAI offers interpretation training for a range of skill levels and applications. The NAI’s Certified Interpretive Guide (CIG) training and certification program develops trainees’ skills in presentation planning and delivery, audience analysis, topic research and analysis, and developing learning/performance objectives (National Association for Interpretation, 2010). While the methods of Venturing focus on the adults advising in the background of the crew’s operations, advisors need these skills to not only be prepared to teach succinct topics and program-related skills to their participants but also to know the methods of interpretation so that they can prepare their youth to teach to and interpret for their peers. Like the SI, the BSA would want to approach the NAI to customize the program for the needs of BSA volunteers who work with older adolescents and to address issues related to the accessibility and costs of the CIG training program.

With the previous two recommended trainings from outside organizations covering the foundational theory of youth development and the method for communicating with youth and

others in the crew, the third training focuses on what could be loosely labeled as the “management” processes within the youth group. Management of processes within a youth program would not be corporate or organizational in nature, but would be more like the management a facilitator of games or activities would use with a group. Facilitation is defined as “the process of producing change by applying reflection, integration, and continuation techniques before, during, or after a learning experience” (Priest, Gass, & Gillis, 2000, p. 150). The experiential nature of youth programs makes facilitation well suited for supporting the learning process of young people. This fit is especially appropriate when the youth are responsible for their making their own decisions and dealing with the positive and negative consequences resulting from their decisions (e.g. Venturers).

An adult volunteer who gains facilitation skills would be better prepared to support the guided discovery model of learning that is often used in nonformal learning (out-of-school) youth programs. Facilitation skills would also refine an adult volunteer’s communication skills and support the differentiation of leadership approaches between youth and other adults involved with the program. These skills would be complementary to interpretation skills as interpretation provides methods related to the adult volunteers delivering information to others, and facilitation offers methods related to supporting others to learn from their own experience.

The most suitable and accessible training for adult volunteers to learn facilitation skills comes from 4-H, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s youth program that is administrated on a state-by-state basis across the USA. The Pennsylvania State University developed a teambuilding facilitation curriculum¹⁰ (Dubrouillet, et al., 2002) for training Pennsylvania 4-H club leaders to facilitate teambuilding activities with youth 4-H members. The curriculum is an approved 4-H resource for Pennsylvania, and because it was approved by one state, it is potentially available for use by all 4-H programs.¹¹ Customizing and delivering this facilitation training program to adult volunteers of the BSA would require an agreement with the 4-H to use the material and

coordination to implement a network of facilitation trainers across the country. The 4-H's suitability for youth and for an audience of adults who work with youth make the program suitable for developing the capabilities suggested by this study.

Summary: The Benefits of Outside Resources

With the organization's endorsement and encouragement, the package of skills that adult volunteers would learn from the three specialized training programs would provide those volunteers with enhanced abilities to facilitate positive development in the program's youth members. The trainings would be active and fun, and their emphasis on trainee performance and experience would provide adult volunteers with a substantive knowledge base that would not only positively affect their abilities to support youth development but also impact their interactions with other adults in their families, communities, and workplaces. By partnering with the outside organizations that develop the resources, identify appropriate trainers, and specialize in the skills covered in the suggested training programs, the BSA's image as an organization dedicated to improving the lives of youth would improve. With this boost in credibility, the BSA could be viewed by the American public in a new light, as a significant contributor toward the betterment of society.

An added benefit that would come from the delegation of training specializations to outside organizations is that the skills delivered to the adult volunteers could be updated more rapidly as the adult volunteers' needs become better understood. That is, as industry standards are revised with time, research, and experience. The BSA would benefit from these suggested training and skill partnerships because the organization's programs are unique and steeped with tradition and specialized methods. Existing BSA resources would be best utilized by developing and delivering in-house trainings to cover the large base of program specific knowledge and skills

required of its Venturing crew advisors and other adult volunteers. The skills provided by partner organizations could improve the volunteers' capabilities for facilitating youth development.

Improvements to Crew Advisor Training

The participants offered a number of ideas about the training they received and the training they wish they had received. They identified improvements to the training process, and they recommended the addition of training methods that are more sophisticated than typical sit-down training sessions such as shadowing to provide an opportunity to observe a skilled advisor and a continuing education scheme to refresh skills related to supporting youth. They also identified improvements to the training content that they described as necessary such as preparing advisors for their own journey of personal growth, for coaching youth to achieve their own goals, and for managing the operations of a Venturing crew. The participants' experiences working with youth prepared them to think critically about the foundation of knowledge that they had received from the organization, and their feedback provided a substantive vision for a possible training scheme for the BSA.

Within the context of the other training suggestions that I have made based on the study's findings, the participants' suggestions for improving the training can be readily addressed. As you read in the previous section, trainings in the foundations of supporting youth development (the 40 Assets), interpretation, and facilitation would provide adult volunteers with a substantial base of skills preparing them for meaningful work with youth. Pursuing these trainings would allow the BSA to partner with other organizations in order to enhance its credibility and connectedness to the youth work sector while allowing the BSA to specialize its in-house trainings on unique details about the organization and programs. The BSA could optimize the training experience for its adult volunteers by reconfiguring its training delivery method into a three-part series with

entry, intermediate, and refresher components covering information and skills important to its crew advisors. While some parts of each of these components may already exist in the BSA, I will explain each part of the series as if it is being proposed anew.

The entry stage of adult volunteers could focus on providing the basics, as in the traditions of the BSA, the policies for ensuring the safety of youth, the specific methods of the Venturing program, the capabilities of relatively successful advisors, and the introduction of interpretation, facilitation, and youth development. Please note, interpretation, facilitation, and youth development would be covered by the partner organizations' trainings. Modules covering each of these "basics" would aim to provide relevant facts and details. Just like the BSA's present training scheme, completion of online training modules could be a pre-requisite for attending face-to-face sessions.¹² At the conclusion of a single day (or two-part multi-day) training, trainees would be introduced to an experienced adult volunteer. This experienced volunteer would remain connected with small groups of the trainees throughout the course of the upcoming year while the participants complete the remainder of the basic training process. Then, within one year of taking the entry-level training session, trainees must complete at least one of the three specialized trainings in interpretation, facilitation, or youth development. Written into each of the specialized trainings would be a reflection and presentation about how the specialized training that the trainee is attending connects with the methods of Venturing and how their skills would be further refined by attending each of the other two specialized trainings. This approach would provide a preview and a sense of continuity among all of the specialized trainings.

Policy regarding training requirements, recognition, and token incentives currently motivate adult volunteers to complete the recommended trainings within the BSA, and while I would like to be altruistic to believe that volunteers would pursue the trainings according to the value of the knowledge and skills that they receive by completing those trainings, I am not naïve. Therefore, these three factors would have a role in this proposed training scheme. Basic training

could be considered complete when an adult volunteer completes the BSA's set of training sessions specifically for crew advisors and one of the three specialized trainings (which could be completed in any order). Re-registration as the crew advisor would be contingent upon that volunteer completing those trainings within one year of assuming the crew advisor role. Then, special recognition within the BSA would be awarded to volunteers who complete the other two specialized trainings within three years of joining the Venturing program. If the recognition is paired with time-specific special incentives such as reduced or waived annual registration fees for the volunteer or the ability to register a Venturing crew to attend special events held by the local BSA council, the trainings could be more attractive to the volunteers and their crews.

The intermediate trainings would be designed to support adult volunteers who are within their first three years of working with youth. These trainings would meet infrequently, possibly once every two to three months, and would focus on helping advisors learn or recall skills related to the capabilities of relatively successful advisors and the methods of the Venturing program. The aim of these trainings would be to reinforce all of the skills related to facilitating successful youth development with the program and to prevent those skills from becoming intermittently valued and reinforced with the program's community of volunteers and administrators.

The existing recognition scheme for adult leaders in the BSA requires attendance at regularly scheduled gatherings of Venturing program volunteers and administrators in order for volunteers to earn particular recognitions, and that method could be continued with this proposal. The existing format for the regularly scheduled gatherings, however, requires revision in the context of this proposal. Known as the *Venturing Monthly Program Forums* (Boy Scouts of America, 2007b), where the major topics categories include "how-to", activities and games, and program features all related to the Venturing program and crew operations, these forums are generally not well attended. Furthermore, the existing forum topics are not related to a mission of

youth development or a journey of personal growth for the adult volunteers as this training proposal is attempting to infuse.

The last component of this proposed training scheme are refresher trainings, which I envision to be a quality control and skills update mechanism within the program. A problem with the current BSA training scheme is that once an adult volunteer satisfies the organization's basic training requirements for the role that they serve in, the only required "re-takes" of any of the training modules are for trainings related to youth protection. The refresher trainings I propose would target experienced adult volunteers, asking them to attend a shortened review or recapitulation of the trainings related to the development of youth. Every adult volunteer should revisit one or more of the topics related to the capabilities of relatively successful crew advisors at least once every three to four years. A method could be designed to relieve adult volunteers of the need to attend refresher sessions if they request an observation or a consultation with an evaluator who can observe one or two meetings or activities where the volunteer interacts directly with youth. Regardless, the function of both the intermediate and refresher trainings is to prompt the active implementation and usage of the skills related to adult volunteers' support for positive youth development so that the skills are not seen as "one and done" requirements that fail to change abilities and attitudes in the volunteers.

The training scheme that I propose here represents a synthesis of the findings and suggestions made by the study participants across the research questions that guided this study. This training scheme attempted to conceptualize a training method for adult volunteers that would satisfy the learning demands that emerge from the capabilities of relatively successful advisors described in Chapter 6. The demands of the capabilities place a tremendous amount of responsibility onto the adult volunteers. While the volunteers' basic training expectations change minimally—to the extent of adding just one specialized training from a partner organization—a fully trained volunteer would gain experience with a package of skills that would make them

highly qualified to work with youth. Arguably, they could be qualified to a nearly professional degree. There are weaknesses to such an ambitious proposal for training. Those weaknesses, numerous strengths, and opportunities for future research and refinement are summarized in Chapter 10.

However, in my mind, this preliminary training scheme also accomplished a second important aim. It makes the journey better for the adult volunteers and for the youth who are supported by those adult volunteers. With a full host of skills for affecting positive change in the learning and lives of the program's youth members, the adult volunteers who possess a working knowledge of the Venturing program and the capabilities of relatively successful advisors would have the tools necessary to ensure that positive development would be much more highly probable than those crew advisors without comprehensive training. By applying the findings of this study to the improvement of adult volunteer preparation, there is also significant consequence for the congruence of the BSA's mission and vision and the content of its training. This makes time, energy, and other resources invested in preparing adult volunteers potentially much more efficacious, and therefore worthwhile, for the numerous BSA local council volunteers who must prepare each new generation of incoming crew advisors.

Applying the Findings to My Aspirations

Earlier, in Chapter 5, I outlined four sets of personal aspirations that represented my underlying motivations for conducting this research study. The aspirations targeted four constituencies according to the role that they played in problems that I identified and intended for this research to address. The dialogue with the participants helped me to better understand not only my aspirations, but also the institutions and people targeted by the aspirations. In turn, the findings of the study can be applied to not only the problems that I wanted this study to address,

but also to me personally. Specifically, the findings can be applied to my vision for youth programs in general and the Venturing program in particular.

The first aspiration I presented suggested that there would be tremendous benefit to American society if the BSA would embrace its potential as a youth development organization and not merely a program for providing youth activities. This study showed that at least one other participant, Pam, shared the same perspective as I do, and other participants' comments led me to believe that they also saw deficiencies in the means by which the BSA's youth programs are delivered. The crew advisors could influence some of those deficiencies themselves, while other deficiencies would need to be addressed on an organizational level. For example, individual Venturing crew advisors could choose to develop the capabilities identified by this study with their own effort and free will by seeking out books, people, or other resources with information relevant to the topics that interest them. They could prepare for their interactions with youth by composing outlines so that they restrict themselves from talking too much and denying Venturers opportunities to learn. They could keep a journal of what worked and what did not in terms of activities and helping Venturers achieve their own goals. Ultimately, these self-directed advisors could become strong and versatile leaders within their crews by advising the youth and managing the other adults with grace and skill. However laudable and beneficial these individual advisors' efforts could be, they would lack appreciation and reinforcement in the Venturing program community unless the organization specifically structured itself to teach, develop, and encourage the implementation of these skills. Without the benefits of support from a community of like-minded people in the organization surrounding the advisor, individual efforts to focus on youth development would wane.

This study helped me realize some important possibilities regarding individual crew advisors. The participants I met were quite skilled at making meaningful personal growth and development happen in the youth of their Venturing crews. While I did not employ a randomized

sampling method for recruiting the participants, personal experience tells me that the odds are slim for more than one relatively successful crew advisor to exist within a given locale. Despite the fact that the participants were not surrounded by a community of like-minded advisors focusing on positive youth development, they still made it happen, and made a difference in the lives of the young people. This leads me to believe that there would be tremendous benefit in having the BSA value the same youth development skills and speak with the same youth development-oriented language as the participants. If establishing organization-wide value is a distant goal, there are substantial benefits to be had by targeting individual crew advisors and other adult volunteers in the BSA who would enjoy learning new concepts and skills to improve their own abilities to work with youth. And since the BSA and the Venturing program is just a sample organization and could represent other youth programs, there could be a market in youth program volunteers, albeit an initially small market, for developing and delivering a comprehensive training program based on the capabilities identified by this study. That is, it may be better for me to try to help a few people at a time if helping everyone in the organization all at once becomes impossible.

Thus, the second aspiration that targeted Venturing crew advisors becomes possible. I previously wrote that I wanted crew advisors to know, understand, and strive for becoming successful by design—and not by chance—at facilitating the positive development of the Venturers in their crews. If I took the approach of focusing only on the transformation of the BSA's approach to adult volunteer training, I would miss the opportunity to transform the perspective of some highly motivated individual crew advisors. Supposing that the crews of the highly motivated crew advisors who I could help had about ten youth members each (from my experience in the past and with this study, this ratio is typical), there would be a ten-fold return in terms of the youth lives that would be positively affected by each of the individual crew advisors. Although changing the BSA would take a very long time, and it may require more time and

energy than what I can invest as an individual, optimizing the adult volunteers so that they may consequently provide an optimized experience for the youth of their crews would build community and provide more opportunities for research and refinement of the preliminary concepts emerging from this research study.

On the other hand, the improvements that I seek for crew advisors and the BSA's Venturing program are not necessarily marketable qualities that would be attractive to teenagers. Many youth are happy with the Venturing program in its current state—a program that is the product of advisors who have the training background that I am attempting to change. The proportionally low membership numbers of the Venturing program when compared to the Boy Scout program would not be directly affected to any large degree if the preparation of the advisors were to be any different, because most older youth have numerous after-school and out-of-school clubs, groups, teams, and activities that all compete against the BSA for membership. But we do know that youth can be influenced by the perceptions of their peers, parents, and community, and while these tendencies tend to work against the BSA when youth choose sports or other activities over joining or staying with the Venturing program, there is good reason to believe that if the BSA was seen as a positive contributor to the people of a locale, the organization would gradually gain membership due to the effects of one skilled crew advisor. In essence, we might not be able to appeal directly to the potential Venturers to seek out the youth development benefits that a re-envisioned Venturing program could offer, but we could appeal to those who surround the youth and dissuade them from being unconscious obstacles hindering youth from joining the organization.

And lastly, there was the aspiration I had for myself to develop personally and professionally into a role in society where I could affect positive change as a bridge between academic contexts, where knowledge is power, and “Anytown, U.S.A.”, where relationships are power. Aside from a few small research projects conducted while I worked for university

outreach, this research study was a project where I had a genuine opportunity to work with the public and attempt to make a small improvement to problems that I identified in society. In addition to satisfying requirements for an academic degree, the work was intended to be accessible to an audience beyond the university. This accessibility could potentially help readers remedy problems that they have found to be similar to the ones I identified earlier in this report.

I believe that this study has helped me begin the personal development process toward achieving my personal aspirations. I was able to gather a rich corpus of authentic data from the participants and synthesize it into a set of principled recommendations that present a workable plan for developing a training program that addressed complex needs. I have experienced the challenge of consistently delivering a message that can be understood by an audience of the interested public through the composition of this report. In all, the research study, and particularly its findings, stand as indicators of my developing abilities to serve as a conduit for the knowledge of the academy interpreted into terms that are immediately relevant and applicable to the general public.

In addition to this chapter's reflection about the connections between the research study, the study's findings, the utility of the findings for supporting positive youth development in youth-focused programs, and the personal revelations I had as a result of the study's analysis, I have also conducted a structured review of the study. Chapter 10 presents a SWOT analysis to summarize the attributes that could help or harm the achievement of the study's ultimate goal (Strengths and Weaknesses), as well as the external conditions that would support or prevent the goal of the study from being achieved (Opportunities and Threats).

⁸ See <http://www.search-institute.org>.

⁹ See <http://www.interpnet.com>

¹⁰ Full disclosure: the teambuilding facilitation curriculum was developed by my prior workplace colleagues at the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center, a unit of Penn State

University Outreach. The developers are skilled professionals, regarded nationally, who I know and trust. SCEC currently delivers the teambuilding facilitation curriculum as a Penn State undergraduate course, and as a training program to public groups for a fee.

¹¹ Local rules may apply—out-of-state training programs and materials may require approval by some state or county 4-H administrators prior to implementation.

¹² The BSA currently delivers its introduction to the history and ideals of the organization, known as *This is Scouting*, and the organization's youth protection policy training with Web-based training modules accessible only by registered members of the BSA through the organization's online portal known as *MyScouting.org*.

Chapter 10

In Closing: The Effects of the Study on Others and on Me

In Chapter 2, I reminisced about my Boy Scout troop's Scoutmaster, and how Duane's dedication to youth, and to me personally, had a significant impact upon my upbringing. Had it not been for Duane's willingness to pick me up at my Mom's apartment complex and drive me to weekly meetings and weekend trips, I probably would have quit the Boy Scout program altogether. Quitting the Boy Scouts may have significantly altered my life. Duane was more than a Scoutmaster—his dedication and care had a lasting impact on my life, similar to the impact of my grandfathers. And today, when I use what I know to look back on my youth and Duane's role within it, I can see that Duane's involvement, supervision, and informal counsel were important interventions at necessary times that kept my head straight, my shoulders square, and my path through adolescence free from harm.

However, there are many facets to goodness. For example, consider the other Boy Scouts in Troop 837 to get a clearer picture of the youth development that occurred as a result of the package of experiences that happened for everyone involved, and not just me. The troop was small, and there were probably never more than a dozen kids registered to it during my time as a member. There were only two adult leaders who worked with the youth, which just met the BSA's minimum requirement for troop leadership. The troop's activities followed a consistent routine, year-in and year-out: fall campout in the Town of Barre, fall camporee organized by the district, winter campout in a cabin at Camp Dittmer from December 27 to 31, district-organized Klondike Derby (winter camping event), spring campout at the same Town of Barre campsite, district-organized spring camporee, council-organized fishing derby at Camp Dittmer, and summer camp at Camp Dittmer. Since the event's organizers set the date, time, and location for

all of the troop's events, the majority of the opportunities for youth to exercise leadership were limited decisions determining the menu, delegating who would set-up specific equipment, establishing and maintaining a list of camp duties (i.e. cooking, meal clean-up, firewood gathering, etc.), and receiving instructions at events or competitions that needed to be disseminated to the other Scouts. As far as quintessential Boy Scout advancement was concerned, I was the only Eagle Scout Award recipient in the history of the troop before it ultimately folded; other youth earned a few ranks and merit badges. The troop and its activities provided youth with exposure to the outdoors and outdoor skills, opportunities to get away from daily routine, a chance to belong to a group, and limited opportunities for leadership, learning outside of school, and humanistic ideals like the Scout Oath and Scout Law (see Appendix D). While Duane was benevolent and grandfatherly to me and most other youth, the truth is that his Boy Scout troop provided little in the way of rich, diverse, youth-focused, youth development experiences. The troop delivered a program of youth activities, and not a program for youth enrichment.

I cannot and do not cast any blame—I had a positive experience, and the people I met and the opportunities I had with my Boy Scout troop are invaluable to me. The value that the other youth got from the program, however, is my concern now. Studying education triggered an ongoing reflection on my experiences as a Scout. I now look at Scouting, Venturing, and other youth programs and question the effectiveness of the lesson designs across all demographics, the methods that adult leaders could use to assess whether youth have actually learned the skills that they just spent an hour demonstrating, or the need to minimize the extrinsic rewards that are commonly used to motivate most Scouts to “learn” skills. The lens of education has not made me want to ruin the fun that young people have when they join their peers in a youth program, rather it has helped me see that the fun could be the vehicle for positively changing the lives of those youth in ways they may never realize.

They may not have known the terminology nor fully realized the benefits they made happen, but the participants in the study reported here are positively influencing the development of the young people in their Venturing crews. There are differences in the target age group and the methods of the Boy Scout program compared to the Venturing program. The Boy Scout program is more structured and adult volunteers are more directive toward the early adolescent youth. Yet, an adult volunteer who was dedicated to the positive development of youth would interact with the youth members in much of the same manner across the two programs. The takeaway point here is that positive youth development outcomes in the BSA are not only possible but also are being attained despite the fact that an emphasis on youth development has not been intentionally written into the BSA's programs.

The differences between youth development programming and youth activity programming are in the people leading the program—the adult volunteers themselves. The optimization of the youth development outcomes, so that every youth can have the same opportunities as Venturers in the participants' crews, relies on organizational change. Scoutmaster Duane did not have the personal background or training that would have prompted him to focus on youth development just like the study participants have, but had he received the training and the encouragement from the BSA, his dedication and concern for youth surely would have made the time his youth members spent with him a truly transformational experience for them.

It was my experience as a youth in the BSA that led me to conduct this research study, and it was this research study that helped me appreciate the value of enthusiastic and well-meaning adult volunteers who work with youth programs. However, within the group of well-meaning adult volunteers, the ones who arrive to the youth program with a vision for what they believe youth are able to accomplish independently, without the direct intervention of adults, are the ones who I believe are able to affect significant personal development for the youth of their

program. By fostering an interest of youth development among more adult volunteers and providing them with the knowledge and skills that would help them achieve positive youth development, the greater the impact the youth program will have upon a local area, and ultimately, upon society. I found this chain of reasoning to be the most meaningful personal outcome from this study, where my concerns about the BSA's program and trainings were highlighted, but the emphasis on the importance of each individual adult volunteer was reinforced.

Personal Assumptions Affected by the Study Findings

Although the presentation of my research as an SPN integrated my personal perspectives as a tool for gathering and analyzing data, I also wanted to minimize the number of assumptions that I made about the research participants and the information that they would provide. However, this research experience has affected the few assumptions that I did have when I entered into this project, providing me with the opportunity to grow and learn about myself in addition to the topics I was researching. Below I will briefly identify each of the three assumptions and describe how they were affected by the study and the findings.

Prior to my first interview with my first research participant, I was uncertain about the level of sophistication that I could expect with regard to the participants' abilities to discuss topics related to youth development in general and the particular support for personal growth they have provided to the Venturers in the crew. I held this assumption because the VLST curriculum that the participants held in common provided minimal exposure to information related to youth development, and my thinking was that without training in the knowledge, concepts, and terminology of youth development it would become difficult to discuss those topics. I now know that my thinking was too rigid—while most of the participants did not have any structured

training in youth development, their experiences in working with youth made them quite capable of describing their personal perspectives about and their preferred advisement methods for supporting the positive personal growth of youth development. In other words, the participants' dialogue with me was far more involved than I was originally prepared for. Having this assumption be debunked so early into the study was a benefit for me because it made me more aware of the depth to which the participants were speaking, which was important because they were not speaking about youth development in the same language as the books and articles I had read to prepare for this research, but they were indeed speaking about related concepts.

Experiencing the sophistication of the participants' conceptualization of youth development topics also helped to affirm a second assumption, being the assumption I made (and discussed in Chapter 3) to approach the problems I saw with the preparation of crew advisors to support the positive development of their crew's Venturers through enhancements to the basic training for that role in the BSA. While exposure to formal education or training about youth development was minimal, the concepts were not foreign, and in fact, the concepts were quite comfortable for the participants. My in-person experiences with the participants and the information that they provided to me served to affirm my beliefs that substantial training related to both theoretical understanding and applied skills and strategies of youth development would be a tremendous benefit to crew advisors in the BSA. With the capabilities of relatively successful crew advisors (see Chapter 6) as a guide, a training approach that emphasized the crew advisors' understanding of youth development concepts and the acquisition of actionable skills that would support positive youth development in their Venturing crews (like the scheme I proposed in Chapter 9) could have a substantial effect on the readiness of adult volunteers to facilitate youth development by design without the need for extensive educational or professional background.

The third assumption that I held that was affected by the study findings was that the introduction of scholarly resources (like the *40 Developmental Assets*) and a formal research

interview process would be foreign and uncomfortable to the research participants. The participants proved this assumption false outright. Looking back, I probably held this assumption partially due to self-consciousness, given the chidings I had received in the past from Scouting friends about being bookish and impractical, and partially due to projection, where I incorrectly believed that all of the research protocols that I worried about in my mind were also concerns of the participants. As it turned out, what I knew to be “scholarly” resources based on large quantities of empirical data appeared to the participants as well-thought guidelines and points for discussion, and the concerns that I had about digitally recording the audio of our interviews or asking a specific set of questions before the interview could proceed ultimately did not generate much notice from the participants. Quite simply, in the future I will worry less about potential divisions between the research participants and I, and think more about providing them with the most relevant and useful resources and the most comfortable experience discussing topics in which we share a common interest.

Self-Evaluation of Research Study Outcomes

Following on from the affirmation or denial of my personal assumptions it would seem to be important to ask about the potential impact that this research study could have on others who consume it or who are connected with its effects. The following section presents a self-evaluation to address that question. Based on the human and organizational factors presented in this report, the vision I have for the outcomes of the study is to effect positive change in educational youth-focused organizations' training of adult volunteers in order to improve youth programs' abilities to facilitate the positive development of youth. A SWOT analysis (Wikimedia Foundation, 2010b) reviews attributes (or internal conditions) that are strengths and weaknesses for achieving an objective (or in this case, a vision). Likewise, external conditions that present opportunities or

threats to achieving the objective are scrutinized. The SWOT framework allows me to critically review the results of this study in light of my interests for them to be useful for furthering scholarly research and for promoting strategic change in public and private youth serving organizations across the country.

Strengths of the Study

After analyzing the detail-rich and authentic data that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study, I believe that the study's qualitative methodology was one of its greatest strengths. The ability to spend over 4.5 hours with each participant, and to ask her/him open-ended questions along with follow-up questions based on their previous responses provided an opportunity to focus on an organization and a type of adult volunteer that had not been examined in previous research studies. The extended dialogue with the participants allowed me to develop a detailed profile of not only them as individuals but also their collective roles in the organization as well as in the lives of the youth and families they serve.

My background in Scouting and with the Venturing program played a significant part in both the design and delivery of the research questions. By asking the participants the same set of interview questions that targeted the range of experiences that they had as crew advisors, I was able to synthesize from those conversations a set of capabilities that represented the existing characteristics of relatively successful crew advisors and the characteristics that advisors may want to develop in order to more readily support the positive development of youth. These capabilities may not yet be refined to their most elemental forms, but in terms of a metaphorical stone house of theoretical constructs, they provide a study structure that can be tested and revised.

A final strength of the study is the benefit it could potentially bring to the BSA. This strength relates to adult volunteer readiness to accept and work with resources produced by

organizations other than the BSA. Instead of relying on the BSA's in-house precedent for developing the basic training for Venturing crew advisors, I asked each of the participants to work with the 40 Assets to assess whether they would be averse to a resource that was not originated within the BSA. The participants' positive response opened the door to introducing new, specialized resources to the adult volunteer training of the BSA. These resources could allow the BSA to focus its own training development efforts on its program specifics while partner organizations could address skills that would directly affect adult volunteers' preparation for facilitating youth development in their local Venturing crews. The prospects for these specialized trainings to affect the outcomes of youth is just one of a number of topics for future inquiry resulting from this study (see Opportunities below).

Weaknesses and Limitations of the Study

The benefits of the study's methodology and the resulting fruitful dialogue also gave rise to a few of the study's weaknesses. One weakness was the independence that I had to conduct the research. While the independence allowed me to pursue this topic on the basis of my personal background, the lens through which the entire study was viewed was my own. Although I had a critical friend and a review committee available for support, problem solving, and plausibility verification, conducting a study like this with a small team of well-versed researchers would have further refined and enhanced the method and findings. For example, throughout the review and transcription of the participant interviews, I asked, "Why didn't I ask a follow-up question to that statement?" While I was able to ask most of the follow-up questions that were necessary or useful to understand the participants' perspectives, I now realize that there were better follow-up questions that I could have asked in order to clarify their statements or to make explicit some of their points.

Issues related to sampling method and sample size are also areas of weakness. The limitations on time, travel, and other resources made interviewing ten participants a challenge. Although the maximally varied sample of five participants are not an unusually small number of participants for qualitative research studies, it is a limitation that prevents me from generalizing the findings to all Venturing crew advisors. Furthermore, the method for selecting participants was dependent upon judgments made by myself and by people who administrate the Venturing program across a number of local BSA councils without a mechanism in place to standardize those judgments. While the participants I interviewed met the criteria of the study, I cannot be certain that I captured the broadest pool. My uncertainty stems from threats of personal and situational bias.

Lastly, in Chapter 3 I made presented an argument regarding why the Venturing program, and its crew advisors, could serve as a proxy for most youth development organizations and their corps of adult volunteers. Despite those claims, there would have increased validity in conducting similar interviews with volunteers in other youth organizations.

Opportunities for Future Research

The opportunities for the vision of the study to be achieved are dependent on the strength of the evidence that could be presented to youth-focused organizations. Given that this study was exploratory by design, the need to strengthen the evidence for the cause presents a number of opportunities for future research studied guided by the findings of this study.

The research study described in this report could be expanded in two ways to provide the most immediately available future research opportunities. There is a need to recruit adult volunteers from other youth programs and conduct a similar set of interviews with them. The data that would be collected through those interviews could then be analyzed alongside the subset of

interviews that have not been analyzed to determine whether similar constructs, like the capabilities of relatively successful crew advisors, emerge. Inclusion of the subset of interviews with interviews from new participants would increase the overall sample size and generalizability of results. In addition to adding more participants, a second aspect of expanding the current study would target an exhaustive literature review. While the current study focused on the theoretical foundations behind this study, aggregating literature from the fields of education, psychology, interpersonal communication, and leadership development could provide an interdisciplinary theoretical base for the capabilities of relatively successful crew advisors.

Complementary to the strategy of including adult volunteers from other youth-focused organizations in an interview-based research study, there is also a need to launch an observation-based study capture the adult volunteers interacting directly with youth in real-time. Protecting the identity of the participants, especially the youth, could potentially be an issue for observations, but the first-hand look at the volunteers in action would provide a potent base of information for interviewing those same volunteers about their perspectives regarding the observed adult-youth interactions. Such an observational study would also create an opportunity to interview the various programs' youth themselves (and even former members of those programs), to inquire about the qualities of adult volunteers that they find admirable or desirable.

One last prospect for future research returns back to Chapter 3 and the pair of interviews I did with personnel involved with training adult volunteers in the 4-H and GSUSA programs. The information collected from those interviews served to compare and contrast the BSA's training approach for adult volunteers with other large and national youth organizations. Data gathered from a multi-organization comparison study could help refine the recommendations made by future studies for improving adult volunteer training schemes. Overall, many opportunities for research exist because of the number of scholarly disciplines that converge within the study of youth organizations and positive youth development.

Threats to Transforming Organizations' Adult Volunteer Training Approaches

There may be plenty of opportunities to conduct research that would strengthen cases for modifying youth organizations' approaches to adult volunteer training, but the decades worth of inertia that exists in large scale tradition-bound organizations like the BSA, GSUSA, and the 4-H, may require more than compelling data. Large-scale organizations, with their layers of administration and membership bases sprawling far and wide, may be resistant to change regardless of the benefits such changes may bring. If the vision for this study were to be achieved the youth organizations would need to be willing to delegate their training design and development tasks to teams of specialists with backgrounds in instructional design, training, education, and human development instead of, or in addition to, using in-house staff members to perform those tasks. Moreover, formalizing this training would need to be evaluated to determine whether formal training on these issues actually succeeds at providing the desired soft skills. It also should not be overlooked that the apparent "academization" of the training approach proposed by this research study may repel those volunteers and organization professionals who have an aversion to learning in general. The comprehensiveness of the adult volunteer preparation I have called for in this report may ultimately come at a price of being distasteful to some.

Aversion to learning is a mild concern compared to another facet of inertia that I fear: outright refusal to learn. In the BSA, it is possible to attend a few three- to six- hour training sessions, offer minimal verbal comments during the sessions, and successfully "complete" the basic training requirements of the organization. The youth development focused training scheme that I proposed is exactly the opposite. It would take multiple days to complete. There would be performance-based assessment and tests. Over the course of the entire set of trainings I recommend, trainees would spend far less time sitting in their chairs than they do with the current basic training for Venturing crew advisors. While all of these qualities may align with an

instructional designer's approach, such a mandate demonstrate a skill could be threatening to volunteers who have grown accustomed to sitting quietly, doing little, and getting by all the same.

But before the proposals made from this study would ever be seen by a whole cadre of incoming adult volunteers, the BSA itself would need to contend with a whole new way of delivering its training programs. The collaboration with other organizations to provide the specialized trainings would require a front-loaded effort. For example, the logistics of partnering with another organization would be a challenging process initially, but hammering out the financial and record-keeping details would require dedication. There is also an issue with the potential increase in costs that organizations and volunteers together could incur since more entities are involved with their basic training. While this may seem insurmountable at first, there are solutions to cost factors such as volume pricing or the purchase of rights to a particular training package.

Overall, the threats to the vision for affecting positive change in adult volunteer training methods in youth organizations are quite daunting. The challenges would not be simple to overcome. But from the challenges would come opportunity, and from the opportunity would come youth who received an optimized program experience. That optimized program experience would include leaders prepared and dedicated to growing the developmental assets that help youth become contributing members of society.

Concern for Youth is Important, Preparation for Supporting Youth is Better

This entire study was concerned with optimizing crew advisors in the BSA for supporting the positive development of youth. By exploring the knowledge and skills of crew advisors and assessing what they need a foundation was laid for a thoughtful redesign of their training program so that they may not only have good intentions for their efforts in supporting youth but also good

outcomes. No complaint should be made about adults who have a desire to dedicate their personal time, effort, and other resources to the next generation. However, dedicating resources to investments that are known to return only sub-par dividends ultimately robs both the investor and the beneficiary. Since most adult volunteers who invest their resources into youth have sincere intentions to improve the condition of young people and society, youth-serving organizations owe volunteers the opportunity to improve themselves in order to improve the returns received from their investment. A youth-serving organization that strengthens its adult volunteers not only compensates its volunteers with a payment of self-improvement, but the organization also strengthens the youth who grow to carry on efforts to improve the organization's condition for the next generation. Thus, my aims were to identify methods by which the BSA could enhance its returns from its investment in its volunteers, so that those volunteers would have a strategy for generating returns on their investments in youth.

At the conclusion of the VLST, using the words of Abraham Lincoln, the BSA has reinforced to the volunteers why their investments in youth are important:

A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting and, when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are most important. You can create all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities and corporations . . . the fate of humanity is in his hands (Boy Scouts of America, 1998b, p. 37).

Lincoln's words are wise and timeless, and the BSA chose the appropriate moment for reminding crew advisors of the audience of young people who are the priority of the entire organization. However, these words reinforce the needs for adults to be merely concerned with youth and they fail to reinforce the needs for adults to improve themselves so that they may provide relationships, guidance, and growth opportunities effective for growing the character and values within youth. This study is the beginning of a personal quest to help the BSA, and other youth organizations where possible, to move beyond mere concerns about youth, and move

toward concerted effort to actively and strategically improve the people who surround the youth.

If youth are products of their surroundings then lets improve their surroundings.

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Appendix A

40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents One-Page Handout



40 Developmental Assets® for Adolescents (ages 12-18)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as Developmental Assets®—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.



| | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--|
| External Assets | Support | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school. |
| | Empowerment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood. |
| | Boundaries & Expectations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts. School boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences. Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well. |
| | Constructive Use of Time | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. Time at home—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week. |
| Internal Assets | Commitment to Learning | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement Motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school. School Engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school. Reading for Pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week. |
| | Positive Values | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs. |
| | Social Competencies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. Interpersonal Competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. Cultural Competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently. |
| | Positive Identity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future. |

Appendix B

Generic Interview Questions

The following questions were the basis for interviews one, two, and three with each of the participants. Specific follow-up questions were asked to each participant during interviews two and three based on statements each participant made during the previous interview in the series. Those specific follow-up questions are not included below.

Background & Experience: First Meeting's Interview Questions

BSA Background

- Were you a Scout (or Venturer/Explorer) in your youth?
 - Did you belong to any other youth organization like 4-H, Boys/Girls Club, sports teams, etc.?
- How long have you been involved in with the BSA?
 - What have your roles been?
 - What was your level of involvement with those roles?
- Are your own children involved in your Venturing crew?
- Why did you choose to become involved with Venturing in the first place?
 - Why did you choose to become the advisor of your crew?
- Are you active with BSA programs outside of your Venturing crew?
 - Do you serve any roles on your district or council committee?
 - Have you served on a training team for Venturing (have you been a trainer before)?
 - Have you served on a training team for any other BSA role?

Education & Professional Background

- What do you do in your professional/work life?
- Did you receive any education beyond high school?
 - What did you study?
- How does your professional training and/or higher education help you at all with your role as a crew advisor, if at all?

Current Venturing Crew

- Tell me about your current Venturing crew:
 - number of Venturers actively involved?
 - in general, what are the ages of your Venturers?
 - how many females and males are in your crew?
 - number of adults actively involved?
 - how much time per week do you need to devote to Venturing?
 - what type of activities does your crew participate in?
 - who plans and coordinates those activities?
 - how well do the Venturers and adults work together?
 - how active are your crew cabinet members? (the crew president and her/his vice-presidents, treasurer, secretary, etc.)
 - In what ways, if any, do the personal growth and leadership development awards (i.e. Bronze, Gold, Silver Awards, etc.) influence the program pursued by your Venturers?
 - have you noticed any changes in the activities your crew pursued in the past compared to the present?
- Could you please describe your relationship with your Venturers?
 - What do the Venturers need from you?
 - Are you able to provide them with what they need from you?
 - What do you need from them?
 - Are they able to provide you with what you need from them?

Lessons Learned & Training Improvement: Second Meeting's Interview Questions

- Last time we touched on your relationship with your Venturers. I'd like to continue that discussion:
 - In the time that you've been a crew advisor, have you witnessed any significant changes in any of your Venturers?
 - If yes, what have you witnessed?
 - Have you ever felt proud of any of your Venturers? Tell me about that time.
 - Have you ever felt disappointed in any of your Venturers? Are you willing to tell me more?
 - Has your relationship with your Venturers extended to interaction outside of crew-related activities and events?
 - If yes, how so?
 - Have there been times in your crew advisor "career" that your Venturers have discussed personal or private topics with you? (I do not want to know the contents, just whether or not it happened.)
 - Were you able to help or guide them in a positive way?
 - Why do you think that they chose to consult with you about topics like these?

Preparation for Crew Advisor Role

- What did you expect (or imagine) your crew advisor experience to be like before you started in the role?
 - Has your crew advisor experience matched what you expected/imagined?
 - What was different between your expectations and your experience so far?
- Do you feel like you were well (or adequately) prepared to take on the crew advisor role?
 - What do you wish you would have known about being a crew advisor before/when you first started?
 - If you were responsible for training new and incoming crew advisors, what would you want them to know?
 - Do you have any ideas about how you would teach this to them? (Or, how do you wish you would have been taught this information?)

Developmental Assets Review Setup

- [Final Topic of Second Interview] Would you be willing to do a small “homework” assignment for me before our next (and final) interview?
 - Provide them with a copy of the Search Institute’s one-page “Development Assets for Adolescents” table.
 - This document briefly describes what are known as “Developmental Assets”, or the resources that research has shown that young adults need in their lives in order to experience positive personal growth and character development in their young lives. The BSA has established that the Venturing program supports the positive development of young people who are Venturers, but no one has outlined exactly which of these assets are provided to Venturers. Could you spend some time during the upcoming week before our next interview, say 20-30 minutes, looking over this list and highlighting/marketing which of these assets you believe your crew’s Venturers are receiving? We’ll use your list as a topic of conversation for next week. I’ll send you a reminder by e-mail a few days before our next meeting.
 - If the participant is unable or unwilling to participate in this take-home portion of the interview, then simply offer for them to keep the Developmental Asset table, and that I would like to begin the next interview with their thoughts about what they believe their Venturers receive from participating in their Venturing crew.

Goals & Confirmation: Third Meeting's Interview Questions

- [Introduction] During this interview, our last, I hope to cover three main topics:
 - Your thoughts about the Developmental Assets that you believe your Venturers receive from your crew (the “homework” from last week) [or, I would like to ask you about what you believe your Venturers receive from their experience with your crew];
 - a few questions about the goals you have for yourself, your crew, and your Venturers; and
 - I want to confirm my understanding of a few things that you’ve said in the first two interviews so that you and I both know that I have a clear idea about what you’ve told me. I also want to make sure that I’ve answered any questions you may have, and I’ll give you an idea of what I will do from now on.

Developmental Assets Addressed in Crew

- Were you able to spend some time reading through the Developmental Assets table and highlighting some of the ones that you see your crew providing to your Venturers?
 - Had you ever seen this list or any similar list before I provided it to you?
 - If yes, where?
- Tell me about the assets you see your crew providing to your Venturers? You can use your own words, or refer to the table as you’d prefer. [Proceed through each of the highlight/marked items of the participant’s table.]
- Now that you’ve told me about what your crew provides, I’d like to know how intentional it has been for you and others to provide those resources/benefits to your Venturers.
 - Have you and any of the other adult leaders of your crew ever discussed or planned for facilitating these assets through your crew’s activities?
 - If not, how have the Venturers received these assets if you’ve not intentionally provided for them?
 - If you have, why did you believe that they needed these assets? How did you decide on the methods by which the Venturers would achieve these gains?
- Would a list like this be useful for Venturing advisors? Why or why not?
 - If not, do you believe advisors would benefit from any other resource like this one?
- Returning to some of the questions I asked you about improving the training that crew advisors receive.
 - When you think of the crew advisor training that you’ve received, do you believe anything should be added to or subtracted from the training?

Look Into Future

- Given all that we've discussed regarding the present status of your crew as a whole, yourself as a crew advisor, and your Venturers, I'd like to look ahead to the future with you.
 - Where do you see your crew as a whole going from here?
 - Will you need to do anything special, or otherwise prepare, so that you can help your crew achieve this goal?
 - Where do you see yourself as a crew advisor going from here?
 - What type of crew do you hope to have someday? What will you need to do to get yourself ready for that?
- Lastly, I would like to discuss a few final quotes from our previous interviews... [present quotes and ask outstanding questions]

Appendix C

Venturing Leader Specific Training Purposes and Topics

The following outline of major points and excerpts lists the purposes and topics covered in the Venturing Leader Specific Training (Boy Scouts of America, 1998b). The author selected the excerpts based on their relevance to this report.

Introduction

- ❑ Overall purpose of training: “This training is designed to introduce adult Venturing crew leaders to the basic information needed to operate a crew” (p. 3).

Session One – Here’s Venturing

- ❑ Session purpose: “The purpose of this session is to provide Advisors with an introduction to the mission of the Venturing program and the Boy Scouts of America” (p. 5).
 - What is the Mission of the BSA?
 - The Venturing Oath, The Venturing Code
 - What is Venturing?
 - Venturing Uniform
 - Venturing’s Unique Place in the Boy Scouts of America
 - Charter Agreement to Organize a Venturing Crew
 - Venturing Crew
 - “The Venturing crew is a youth-led organization that recruits members, elects officers, and plans programs based on the organization's program inventory. Adult Advisors provide training and guidance for the crew's elected officers” (p. 8).
 - The BSA Local Council
 - The Methods of Venturing
 - Venturing Crews Nationwide
 - Responsibilities
 - The specific responsibilities of an Advisor include:
 - Fostering an environment within the Venturing crew that has a true sense of community and encourages everyone's growth and responsibility to one another
 - Developing crew officers to lead-to plan, make decisions, and carry out a program of activities over an extended period
 - Encouraging participation and support for the Venturing crew from the chartered organization, associate Advisors, crew committee, parents, and other adults in the community
 - Upholding the standards and policies of the chartered organization and the Boy Scouts of America
 - Providing the necessary framework for protecting the members of a crew from abuse
 - Ensuring that activities are conducted within BSA safety guidelines and requirements. Advisors should be trained by the BSA.

- Seeking to cultivate within the members of a crew a capacity to enjoy life-to have fun through the Venturing experience

Session Two – Understanding and Protecting Youth (90 minutes total for session)¹³

- Session purpose: “The purpose of this session is to learn about the characteristics of Venturing-age youth and to learn about safety and youth protection issues” (p. 11).
 - Adolescent Development Issues
 - Experimentation
 - Movement from dependence to independence
 - Social relationships
 - Physiological changes and sexual maturity
 - Reevaluation of values
 - Understanding Young Adults
 - We need to like young people enough to understand them. Everything in their world is changing so fast, including their bodies and emotions. Young people need a constant; they need something firm to hang on to; they need to be connected to understanding and caring adults. Look below the surface. We as youth leaders can recognize the moments we have in common with young people and be a positive influence (p. 13).
 - Leadership Styles for Advisors
 - Effective leadership styles or skills needed to lead 14- to 20-year-olds:
 - Be a mentor.
 - Be a coach.
 - Walk your talk.
 - Be understanding of the teenage years and their search for autonomy
 - Be able to relate.
 - Show mutual respect as a team member.
 - Develop and demonstrate conflict management skills.
 - Protecting Our Youth (20 Minutes)
 - Introduce the Guide to Safe Scouting
 - Youth Protection Guidelines for Adult Leaders (25 minutes)
 - Youth Protection Personal Safety Awareness (20 minutes)

Session Three – Leadership and Organization (50 minutes total for session)

- Session purpose: “The purpose of this session is to provide participants with an orientation on the leadership and organization required to operate a successful crew” (p. 17).
 - “The key to the success of a Venturing crew is informed, enthusiastic leaders, trained youth officers, and an exciting program of interest. We're going to talk about organization and leadership in this session” (p. 17-18).
 - Crew Bylaws
 - Typical Crew Organization Chart
 - Adult Leaders
 - The Crew Committee
 - The Consultant
 - The Advisors
 - “The Advisors are the key to the success of the crew. They must match the interest of Venturers with the program resources of the chartered organization. This is achieved by training the crew's elected officers to lead their crew, and by planning a relevant program guided by the Advisor and

crew committee. Remember, the word Advisor was chosen carefully. The Advisor is a member of a team of adults that includes the associate Advisors and the crew committee. Advisors work with Venturers to bring about a unique and interesting program. The crew will be unsuccessful if the program becomes a one-person show” (p. 18-19).

- “The Advisor does not have to be an expert in the crew specialty. However, he or she must be a good example for youth and must be able to train and coach the crew's elected officers. He or she must have the full support of the chartered organization. There must be one or more associate Advisors and an active committee” (p. 19).
- The Venturer
- Officers
- Activity Chairs
- The Adult and Venturing Team
- Officers’ Briefing
- The Venturing Leadership Skills Course
- How to Conduct a Reflection
- Synergism Module 3 – Knots

Session Four – Awards and Recognition (60 minutes total for session)

- Session purpose: “The purpose of this session is to describe the Venturing awards and recognitions and emphasize their unique features” (p. 22).
- BARS – Belonging, Achievement, Recognition, Status
- Venturing Advancement
- Venturing Advancement Game
- Four Levels of Learning
- Consultants
- Conducting Boards of Review
- Conducting Crew Reviews
- Venturing Advisor Award of Merit

Session Five – Resources and Program Planning (60 minutes total for session)

- Session purpose: “This session illustrates how to use venturing literature and resources to plan an exciting crew program” (p. 28).
- “The No. 1 reason given by youth no longer in Scouting was boring den meetings, boring troop meetings, and boring crew meetings” (p. 30).
- “Your job as a Venturing adult leader is to be aware of the resources available and to effectively use them to help your crew officers plan and implement an exciting yearlong program that will attract and retain youth” (p. 30).
- Crew’s Program Planning Process
 - Step 1 – Program Capability Inventory
 - Step 2 – Venturing Activity Interest Survey
 - Step 3 – Brainstorm
 - Planning Activity
 - Steps 4, 5, and 6 – Match Adult Survey (PCI) with Youth Survey
 - Fill in the Gaps
 - Schedule the Activities
 - Annual Program Flow
 - Draft Venturing Crew Annual Plan

- Five-Month Plan
 - Step 7 – Select Venturing Chairpersons and Adult Consultants
 - Step 8 – Follow-up is Vital! Assume Nothing!
- Open House Sample Agenda
- Additional Resources
- Questions?
- What's Next?
 - “This training course will be effective only if each of you internalizes the concepts and determines to implement them” (p. 36).
- Closing

¹³ Note that Session Two of the training is listed as being 90 minutes in duration, and 65 minutes of that allotment covers youth safety and protection policies and guidelines. Time allotments are not listed in the syllabus for the other topics of this session. Therefore, only 25 minutes remain to present the first three topics of this session related to teenage youth: Adolescent Development Issues, Understanding Young Adults, and Leadership Styles for Advisors.

Appendix D

Highly Representative and Meaningful Texts of Venturing and the BSA

The following texts are highly valued within the BSA, as they guide the design and delivery of programs; influence the conduct of the members, volunteers, and transactions of the organization; and symbolize the benefits that the organization's programs seek to provide to its members and to society at large.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law. (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b)

Scout Oath

On my honor I will do my best
To do my duty to God and my country
and to obey the Scout Law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong,
mentally awake, and morally straight. (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b)

Scout Law

A Scout is: Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent. (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b)

Vision Statement

The Boy Scouts of America will prepare every eligible youth in America to become a responsible, participating citizen and leader who is guided by the Scout Oath and Law. (Boy Scouts of America, 2010b)

Venturing Oath

As a Venturer, I promise to do my duty to God and help strengthen America, to help others, and to seek truth, fairness, and adventure in our world. (Boy Scouts of America, 1999)

Venturing Code

As a Venturer, I believe that America's strength lies in our trust in God and in the courage, strength, and traditions of our people.

I will, therefore, be faithful in my religious duties and will maintain a personal sense of honor in my own life.

I will treasure my American heritage and will do all I can to preserve and enrich it.

I will recognize the dignity and worth of all humanity and will use fair play and goodwill in my daily life.

I will acquire the Venturing attitude that seeks truth in all things and adventure on the frontiers of our changing world. (Boy Scouts of America, 1999)

Aims of BSA Programs

The aims of the Boy Scouts of America are to build character, develop citizenship, and foster personal fitness. (Boy Scouts of America, 2010c)

Methods of the Venturing Program

The Venturing methods listed below have been carefully designed to achieve the aims of the Boy Scouts of America and meet the needs of young adults.

Leadership. All Venturers are given opportunities to learn and apply proven leadership skills. A Venturing crew is led by elected crew officers. The Venturing Leadership Skills Course is designed for all Venturers and helps teach them in an active way to lead effectively.

Group Activities. Venturing activities are interdependent group experiences in which success is dependent on the cooperation of all. Learning by “doing” in a group setting provides opportunities for developing new skills.

Adult Association. The youth officers lead the crew. The officers and activity chairs work closely with adult Advisors and other adult leaders in a spirit of partnership. The adults serve in a “shadow” leader capacity.

Recognition. Recognition comes through the Venturing advancement program and through the acknowledgement of a youth's competence and ability by peers and adults.

The Ideals. Venturers are expected to know and live by the Venturing Oath and Code. They promise to be faithful in religious duties, treasure their American heritage, help others, and seek truth and fairness.

High Adventure. Venturing's emphasis on high adventure helps provide team-building opportunities, new meaningful experiences, practical leadership application, and lifelong memories to young adults.

Teaching Others. All of the Venturing awards require Venturers to teach what they have learned to others. When they teach others often, Venturers are better able to retain the skill or knowledge taught, they gain confidence in their ability to speak and relate to others, and they acquire skills that can benefit them for the rest of their lives as a hobby or occupation. (Boy Scouts of America, 2010c)

The Specific Goals of Venturing

There are four goals for the participant in Venturing:

- ☐ To gain practical **experience**
- ☐ To engage in a program with a variety of activities to encourage the **development** of the whole person
- ☐ To experience positive **leadership** from adult and youth leaders and be given opportunities to take on leadership roles
- ☐ To have a chance to learn and **grow** in a supportive, caring, and fun environment (Boy Scouts of America, 1999)

The Spirit of Venturing

Venturing is a catalyst.

Venturing is guided discovery.

Venturing is an empowering experience. (Boy Scouts of America, 1999)

VITA

Joshua Aaron Kirby

Joshua Aaron Kirby (born 1979) is native to Albion, New York (USA) and a 1997 graduate of Albion High School. He completed a bachelor's of arts degree in communication studies at the State University of New York—College at Brockport in 2001, where he was named the outstanding scholar of the School of Arts and Performance and a SUNY Chancellor's Award recipient. In addition to completing his doctorate in 2010 at The Pennsylvania State University, Kirby also completed a master's of science degree in educational psychology in 2007. Kirby's education has been enriched with two exchange studies to Japan, the first occurring in 1996-1997 at Mita High School in Minato-ku, Tokyo, and the second at the University of Tsukuba in 1999-2000.

While at Penn State, Kirby served as the Youth Leadership Development Coordinator for the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center, a unit of Penn State Outreach, from 2005 to 2007. When he married and relocated to the Philadelphia suburbs to support his bride's new career, Kirby helped found and coordinate the development of the courses of the fully online, fully asynchronous systems engineering master's degree program with the Engineering Division of the Penn State University School of Graduate Professional Studies at Great Valley from 2007 to 2010. The role at Great Valley provided highly valuable leadership experience in the burgeoning world of online course design and delivery, but Shaver's Creek was where Kirby first developed his passion for community-serving university extension and outreach, and the professional management of all aspects youth-focused nonformal learning programs. Earlier in his career, Kirby also served as a graduate research assistant for the University Libraries and the Instructional Systems Program, and as a teaching assistant in the College of Engineering and the Instructional Systems Program. His educational experience was supplemented by two significant internships, the first as a Federal Bureau of Investigation Honors Intern in 2003, and the second in 2005 as a design research intern for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Classroom of the Future.

Kirby is an Eagle Scout and 23-year veteran of the Boy Scouts of America, and he currently serves that organization as a member of its Research and Technology Task Force for the National Youth Development Committee, as a member of the Northeast Region Area 6 Venturing Committee, and as an Associate Member of the Chester County Council. He longs for outdoor adventures, and environmental conservation training is a favorite hobby as Kirby is a volunteer Master Educator for the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. His loving wife Rebecca (Morgan) Kirby is also a Nittany Lion although she will always see herself as a West Virginia University Mountaineer. Rebecca perseveres toward the completion of her doctorate of School Psychology from Penn State. The future "Drs. Kirby" look forward to literally traversing the world to seek out their dream jobs, cities, and cultures, and a life of growing and supporting their family.

If intentions withstand the test of time, readers will be able to contact Joshua Kirby at josh@zealousagenda.com with their questions or comments.