The impact of outdoor education on the body image and self-efficacy of adolescent girls.

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The impetus of this work is a culmination of 20+ years working as an outdoor educator. My favourite group to work with are Year 9 girls!
Life in the bush: Bushwalking, Rafting, Cycling and Hair Cuts
"To lose confidence in one's body is to lose confidence in oneself."
- Simone De Beauvoir

**Your body image is how you perceive, think and feel about your body.**
Recent Australian stats

38% of girls are concerned about their body image

Poor body image can lead to low self esteem, low confidence, stress, depression, alcohol use, high risk taking behaviours, undereating, overeating, eating disorders and more...

Body positivity can contribute to high self-esteem, high self-confidence and feeling satisfied with your body.
In contrast to the detrimental messages of mainstream culture, outdoor education can offer young women the opportunity to achieve confidence (Whittington & Nixon Mack, 2010), self-efficacy and physical competence (Budbill, 2008), freedom from prescribed beauty norms (Whittington, Mack, Budbill, & McKenney, 2011).
Guiding question:
What if body image was based on what bodies do for us rather than how they look?
Do you feel beautiful in the outdoors because of what your body is capable of doing for you, instead of what it is capable of looking like for others?
Main Research Question

Does an outdoor education program have an impact on the body image and self efficacy of adolescent girls?
There is limited research in the Australian context on the relationship between outdoor education, adolescent girls, body image and self-efficacy. My thesis seeks to broaden our understanding of the contribution of outdoor education on adolescent girls’ body image and self-efficacy.
“Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle…. They lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks.... They report great unhappiness with their own bodies.”

Mary Pipher, 1995
Girls in the outdoors

“Recreating in the outdoors can counteract negative self-body image. Girls can begin to see their bodies for their capabilities, making their own physical appearances much more positive in their eyes. Achieving rock climbing, mountaineering, backpacking, and other outdoor activities shows girls the strength of their bodies in capacities they never imagined.” Kiewa, 1996
Women and girls in the outdoors

Research suggests that female participants show an increase in positive body image at the end of the program and that adventure programming can provide a shift in focus from how one’s body looks to a focus on what one’s body can do. (See references)
Research Design

Phase 1
• Pre test: One week prior to the outdoor education program

Phase 2
• Post-test: One week following the outdoor education program

Phase 3
• Six month follow up
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Recreation Self-Efficacy Scale</td>
<td>Focussed questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectified Body Consciousness Youth Scale</td>
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Overview of Results

• Histograms of the OBC
• Box Plots of Body Shame, Body Surveillance, Control Beliefs Sub scales
• Histograms of the ORSE
• Box Plots of Skills and Competence, Enjoyment and Accomplishment Sub scales
• Qualitative overview
Objectified Body
Consciousness
Mean Score Pre
Objectified Body
Consciousness
Mean Score Post
Objectified Body Consciousness Mean Score Follow Up
Objectified Body Consciousness Mean Scores
Body Shame
Body Surveillance
Control Beliefs
Outdoor Recreation Self Efficacy Mean Score Pre

Frequency (%)

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35

SEMeanScorePre

SEPre ( n= 87 )
Outdoor Recreation Self Efficacy Mean Score Post

![Histogram showing the distribution of Outdoor Recreation Self Efficacy Mean Score Post with frequency on the y-axis and score on the x-axis. The distribution is skewed to the right with the majority of scores falling between 5 and 7.]
Outdoor Recreation Self Efficacy Mean Score Follow Up

SEMeanScoreFollowUp

Frequency (%)

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

SEFU (n= 64)
Outdoor Recreation Self-Efficacy Mean Scores

![Box plot showing self-efficacy scores for different conditions.](image)
Skills and Competence
Enjoyment and Accomplishment
Girls – on body image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did any part of the outdoor education program influence how you feel about your body? If so, which part?</th>
<th>Do you believe that your outdoor education program influenced how you think about your body? If so, how?</th>
<th>What did you learn about what your body can do on your outdoor education program?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, when I was hiking I couldn't care less how I looked or what people thought.</td>
<td>Yes. At camp I started not to care about how I looked and more thought what I would be doing that day.</td>
<td>I learned that my body can withstand a lot, for example when I did hiking, I was almost positive I would not reach the top but I did in the end.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes. Definitely, I feel so much healthier after these past three days and I feel like it was nice to step back and take a break for awhile</td>
<td>Yes. Personally, yes as it made me feel healthier and alive. In a way it was detox.</td>
<td>I learnt that it doesn't matter what your body image is because if you just put your mind to it you can do it.</td>
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## Girls – on Self-Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you learn something new about your abilities on your outdoor education program? If so, what did you learn?</th>
<th>Do you believe that your outdoor education program influenced your belief in your abilities? If so, how?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learnt that I am capable of carrying a pack and hiking through mountains, of all different ground levels without having to take a rest for a long period of time.</td>
<td>I was stunned at how much my body could handle and take on, this allowed me to believe more in my inner strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt I can do a lot more than I think I can. What I've done in the last few days were pretty amazing.</td>
<td>Yes, because I never thought I would be able to hike up really steep mountains and abseil.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
What’s next for the research?

Data Analysis for the Quantitative Results: Paired t-test, Welch two-sample t-tests (taking the difference from the teachers and group leaders and measuring any noticeable variance), Pearson’s Correlation with OBC and ORSE

Data Analysis for Qualitative Results: Further Coding and Theming to narrate the results

Future Research: More schools, residential schools, public schools, inter-state
References

• Foland, J.,(2009). Body Image and Body Valuation in Female Participants of an Outdoor Education Program. State University of New York College.
References


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