

The Impact of Therapeutic Recreation  
Through Ropes Courses and Teambuilding Activities

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF THERAPEUTIC RECREATION THROUGH ROPES COURSES & TEAMBUILDING ACTIVITIES

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Each day people are suffering some type of a disorder - physically, emotionally, mentally, or psychologically. With every new discovery, invention, and generation, both positive and negative affect comes with it. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many individuals are under much pressure due to divorces, deaths, family dysfunctions, finances, cultural expectations, pollution, and high work demands. The basis of this research is to assess the benefits and impact of a ropes course and teambuilding activities have on participants, which leisure activity may potentially improve one's health. The study was conducted at Chumash Challenge during the spring and summer of 2010 in San Luis Obispo, California. The Evaluator took 120 subjects and tested the benefits and impact of the ropes course and teambuilding activities. At the end of the study, results revealed that Chumash Challenge Ropes Course impacted the participants at an emotional and social level. The data revealed which activities had a great impact on the participants and which did not. Recommendations were made to Chumash Challenge of which activities to keep and the area to place more emphasis on. Leisure activity is highly affective in improving one's health.

Keywords: ropes course, team-building, leisure benefits, activities



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	1
Background of the Study .....	1
Review of Literature .....	3
Purpose of ropes courses.....	3
Leisure activity benefits.....	7
Summary .....	9
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Delimitations.....	10
Limitations .....	11
Assumptions.....	11
Definitions of Terms .....	12
2. METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	13
Description of Subjects.....	13
Description of Instrument .....	14
Description of Procedures.....	15
Methods of Data Analysis.....	15
3. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS .....	17

Subject Demographics .....	17
Ropes Course and Teambuilding Activities Effectiveness .....	17
Emotional and Social Affect .....	20
Increase Outlook on Life .....	23
Summary .....	24
4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	25
Summary .....	25
Discussion .....	27
Conclusions .....	30
Recommendations .....	30
REFERENCES .....	31
APPENDIXES .....	34
A. Questionnaire .....	35
B. Informed Consent Letter .....	38

## LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
Challenging Activities .....	19
Favorite Activites.....	19
Activities Affect.....	22

## LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
Names of Activity .....	18
Emotional and Social Affect Chart .....	21
Increase Outlook on Life .....	23

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background of the Study

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a great increase of disorders of every aspect of the human body – physical, emotional, mental, and psychological. The great changes brought on by divorce, death, family dysfunction, finances, cultural expectations, pollution, and stressful work dynamics have triggered many illnesses. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has highlighted the need to make mental health a national priority. In 2007, 24.3 million adults age 18 or older experienced some type of serious psychological distress (SPD), which is 10.9 percent of adults in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Only 44.6 percent received mental health services, while others did not have health insurance to provide their health needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). The rise of health disorders and the lack of adequate healthcare makes it difficult to care for every individual.

Recent studies have revealed the physical, emotional, psychological, and social benefits of leisure. According to Hecht and Boies (2009), non-work activities, like sports, recreation, and fitness programs lead to less somatic complaints and higher life satisfaction. Hecht and Boies discovered “participants of organizational wellness programs with a fitness component have lower absenteeism and higher job satisfaction than nonparticipants” (as cited in Parks & Steelman, 2008, para. 9). These activities may help individuals recover psychological distress that happens during work.

Participation in any type of recreation brings physical, mental, emotional, and psychological healing. Therapeutic recreation provides adequate care for all these needs. Therapeutic recreation have been overlooked and appeared to be purposeless in the healthcare system. However, Coyle, Riley, and Shank (1991) found that participation in recreation and physical activity programs as an essential aspect for participants with substance abuse and an essential care. They also stated that including recreation in treatment programs provide enrichment in physical health, increase in self-esteem, proper time management, relapse prevention, and stress reduction (Coyle, Riley, & Shank, 1991).

Within the therapeutic recreation service are team-building activities and the challenge ropes course. These two services have impacted a wide range of populations. There are many studies that have found the benefit of recreation, but there have been a lack of studies on which types of activities are effective and in what ways. It is important to understand more in depth how each activity affects an individual and the outcome of taking part in such participation. If a study is not done, possible negative outcomes maybe overlooked.

Recognizing which activities are effective and which aren't will greatly benefit the field and the community. Understanding specifically which types of activity are therapeutic will help teachers, mentors, and afterschool programs to know what to incorporate in their curriculum. The study can enhance every recovery, treatment, and afterschool programs. All individuals have different needs and styles of learning and understanding. The research will open a door of opportunity to reach those that have not fit the "traditional system" of therapy.

## Review of Literature

The review of literature was formed through gathering information at the Robert E. Kennedy Library at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Resources were accumulated from Polycat, EBSCO Host, ProQuest databases, and books. The review of literature has been organized by the following topics: purpose of ropes courses and leisure activity benefits.

Purpose of ropes courses. The development of the ropes course goes as far back as the ancient Greeks who used the courses to train military soldiers (Attarian, 2005). It wasn't until the 1980s that ropes courses gradually became a recreational play activity (Attarian, 2005). According to Haras, Bunting, and Witt, "approximately ten thousand ropes courses exist in schools, camps, therapeutic institutions, and park districts in the United States with about 250 more being built every year" (as cited in Rogers, 2000, p. 339). Now, they used for improving self-esteem, confidence, and teambuilding skills. These skills are vital to have in any environment and stage of life.

According to the National Recreation and Park Association, the goal of ropes courses is for "participants to transfer learnings from the ropes course experience to their everyday lives" (Haras, Bunting, & Witt, 2006, p. 340). Early research proclaimed that "structured recreation programs create positive change when they provide challenging activities which demand effort and concentration" (Haras, Bunting, & Witt, 2006, p. 339). Most ropes courses are outdoors and consist of high and low elements. These elements are a combination of individual and group activities that help the participants to overcome fears, anxiety, insecurities, anxiety, depression, and anti-social behavior (Robitschek, 1996). The outcomes of participating the ropes course includes an increase

in teamwork skills, communication, trust, awareness of self and others, and management skills (Haras, Bunting, & Witt, 2006).

Within a ropes course, there are two different challenge courses involved – low and high challenge courses. Both of these courses deliver different benefits with the same purpose of building trust, leadership skills, communication, and being aware of others and self. The low elements of the ropes course are activities that are on or near the ground that are a series of real and made-up obstacles for the participants to work together as a group to overcome and accomplish the challenge (Attarian, 2005).

According to Gillis and Speelman, “low challenge course activities generally focus on group problem solving and team building and range in height from literally sitting on the ground to a height of 12 to 13 feet” (as cited in Rohnke et al., 2007, p. 112). The low elements have different types of activities in order for the participants to gradually form a bond among other participants. The activities are broken down into different sections: cooperative game, socialization, icebreaker; group initiative, trust-building games, and low ropes elements.

*Cooperative game, socialization, icebreaker.* The games are designed to reduce inhibitions and barriers. Some examples include: name games, people to people, and raccoon circle (Ropes Course, n.d.).

*Group initiative.* Participants are given a real or imaginary scenario to solve group-based obstacles together with their resources. Some examples include: group wall, nitro crossing, and carpet maze (Ropes Course, n.d.).

*Trust-building games.* Games that have the group demonstrate to one another their trust through a series of sequenced actions; an example includes the Trust Fall game (Ropes Course, n.d.).

*Low Ropes Course.* According to A Facilitator's Guide to Adventure Challenge Programming, the low elements of a ropes course consist of the following:

A series of cables, ropes, and obstacles strung between trees or poles, 12 to 18 inches above the ground, low rope elements present tests of physical strength, stamina, agility, balance, and flexibility, and invite participants to confront such emotional issues as the fear of falling, the fear of failure, and the fear of losing control. Risk is managed by group members who assume critical spotting roles. Examples include: Swining Balance Beam, Triangle Traverse, Tire Swings, and Mohawk Walk. (Ropes Course, n.d.)

Participants usually begin the ropes course with the low elements first to become familiar with other group members and to build up trust before facing high challenging courses.

As for the high ropes course, they are usually 25 to 50 feet tall with a variety of different levels of balls to hit, ropes and nets for the participants to climb through, and high balance beams to walk across (Ropes Course, n.d.). A high ropes course consists of “utility poles, cables, bolts, that is built by a contractor, or it can be a course that is hand built in a wooded area, where ropes and wire are attached to different trees” (Ropes Course, n.d., para. 8). The high ropes courses are regulated periodically to ensure safety and participants are required to sign a waiver before participating in the high ropes course. Some examples of games include: cargo net, Jacob's ladder, and the climbing

wall. The outcomes are similar to the low ropes course where participants learn to trust, communicate, lead, follow, encourage, and be aware of self and others; however, the high ropes course is more challenging.

Robitschek (1996) did a study of incorporating ropes courses into a summer jobs program for at-risk youth to see how effective ropes course can be. He gave questionnaires before and after the ropes course to measure if the youth's perspective about the future had changed in any way. The intervention had participants participate in a 1-day ropes course program that had a mix of individual and teambuilding activities. In the morning, the participants were involved in the low elements that took place on or near the ground in order to help the participants to become comfortable with one another. The activities allowed the participants to build trust among other group members to increase healthy, intentional risk taking; provide success experiences leading to a sense of mastery and efficacy, and have the group begin to work together to solve problems of increasing difficulty (Robitschek, 1996). Participants switched from low to high elements of the ropes course in the afternoon. The purposes of the high elements were similar to the low elements, yet more challenging activities that required more dependence on one another. The participants were "encouraged to view their fear of the perceived risk and the challenge of the tasks themselves as obstacles of be overcome in striving to meet their goals" (Robitschek, 1996, p. 166). The results showed that the ropes courses did enhance the participants' outlook on life and the future. Overcoming the challenges and fears the participants faced allowed them to see how it was possible for them to be able to achieve their dreams and life goals.

Leisure activity benefits. According to Stumbo and Peterson, leisure is “often defined by perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, and positive effect” (as cited in Cassidy, 1996; Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 5). Leisure brings wellness and improvements in people’s lives in the same way physical and occupational therapy does. The benefits of leisure are beyond fun and relaxation; they also bring physical, emotional, psychological, and social healing.

Recreation was known for the longest time as a time for individuals to have fun and relax from the normal work activity. It has been a challenge for therapeutic recreation to be viewed as a vital role in the healthcare system. However, therapeutic recreation has slowly been gaining recognition in hospitals, senior centers, camps, and rehabilitation centers. According to Stumbo and Peterson, the key aspects for leisure are: personal initiative, choice, meaningful involvement, and supportive social networks (as cited in Wankel, 1994). All of these aspects are important implications for well-being. Leisure has two major influences on health. On one hand, individual acknowledge, value, and engage in leisure activity for their own well being and stress relief (Stumbo & Peterson, 2009). On the other hand, individuals use leisure as a tool to achieve a certain health outcome; for instance, a person who takes the time to exercise on a daily basis.

One of the benefits of leisure is the physical component. Regular physical activity helps regulate weight, and reduces heart attacks and high blood pressure. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion documented that “physical activity has numerous physiologic effects on the cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, metabolic, endocrine, and immune systems” (Stumbo & Peterson, 2009, p. 6).

Emotional well-being also plays a vital role in a person's health. Leisure brings emotional and psychological health to individuals through independent and group activities. When a person finishes an activity, whether it is active (i.e. rock climbing) or passive (i.e. arts and crafts), it brings a sense of accomplishment. According to Kleiber, Hutchinson, and William (2002), leisure plays four important factors in overcoming negative life events. After a traumatic negative impact, leisure activities can become the cushion in a person's life to create a distraction or a distance for the individual to cope. The second important aspect is the fact that leisure activities can provide temporary relief and escape by generating optimism and hope about the future. The third important aspect is that leisure activities can bring a sense of control and normalcy in a person's life when an unexpected negative event occurs. Lastly, leisure activities can bring motivation of attaining new goals and looking forward to the future (Kleiber, Hutchinson, & William, 2002). Though leisure generates a buffer or positive outlook on life, it also helps reduce any mental or emotional stress. Some benefits of leisure activity are: improving self-exploration, improving self-identification, managing and coping stress, create opportunities to make choices and be responsible, decreasing symptoms of anxiety and depression, and experiencing the sense of accomplishment (Stumbo & Peterson, 2009).

Another vital aspect of well-being in a person's life is the social content, which is often overlooked. Physical needs are more tangible, but a person's well being all begins within. If an individual struggles in being secure in his/her own perception of one's self then it will be difficult for the individual to be able to take care of his/her health. Leisure brings many opportunities of social well-being. It promotes teamwork, cooperation, and allowing every individual to utilize his/her own talents and skills. No individual is

greater than another. Some benefits leisure brings socially are: developing, practicing, and applying social interaction skills; developing and maintaining social networks, improving the ability to handle stress; creating and nurturing relationships with others; improving interaction with and acceptance by individuals with disabilities; and improving familial relationships (Stumbo & Peterson, 2009). Similar to physical and occupational therapy, leisure plays a vital role in bringing wellness into people's lives.

Summary. This review of literature covered two different topic areas: the purpose of ropes courses and leisure activity benefits. With today's high demands and responsibilities, many individuals are suffering from all types of illnesses. Leisure is a form of an escape from the everyday demands for every individual. Leisure is not only a time to bond with others and have fun, but to also bring healing and wellness to the individual. The ropes courses and teambuilding activities are great tools in helping business corporations, rehabilitation centers, prisons, schools, and any type of organization to aid individuals from mental, social, emotional, physical, and psychological distress. Evaluating ropes course and teambuilding activities will provide a better understanding of the benefits they provide to the individual in order to share the information to many schools, afterschool programs, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and hospitals to incorporate into their programs and curriculum.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the benefits and the impact of a ropes course and teambuilding activities have on participants.

## Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. How and what types of ropes course and teambuilding activities are effective?
2. Do ropes courses help build participant's self-esteem, self-confidence, social interaction, and decrease self-destructive behavior?
3. Do ropes courses and team-building workshops inspire participants to pursue their dreams and look forward to their future?

## Delimitations

The study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on teambuilding activities was gathered from the Chumash Challenge Ropes Course in San Luis Obispo, California.
2. Rope course participation, team-building activities, mentorship, and the impact on the participants were analyzed.
3. The data were collected during the spring of 2010.
4. Information for this study was gathered using self-administered questionnaires, electronic surveys, and paper, email, and telephone interviews.

### Limitations

The study was limited by the following factors:

1. The subjects for this study were participants who were mainly from the central coast, California.
2. The instrument used in this study was not tested for validity or reliability.
3. The sample size used in this study did not represent every age, ethnic, or gender group.
4. The survey was done during the spring, not representing participants in other seasons.

### Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that participants would be affected by the ropes course and teambuilding activities.
2. It was assumed that participants understood the risk factors of the ropes course.
3. It was assumed that the participants would respond honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
4. It was assumed that the participants were physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically capable of participating the ropes course and teambuilding activities.

Definitions of Terms.

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Externalize Behaviors. described as aggressive or antisocial (Kovacs & Devlin, 1998)

Internalize Behaviors. show signs of anxiety, withdrawal, or depression (Merrell & Walters, 1998)

Leisure. unrestricted time with perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, self-determination, satisfaction, perceived quality of life, and perceived competence (Wankel, 1994)

Ropes Course. a challenging outdoor course for personal development and teambuilding.

## Chapter 2

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Descriptions of Subjects

The population of this study consisted of males and females, age 12 to 50 years from the central coast of California. All types of ethnicities were observed and studied. Participants were mainly from different organizations, such as: private schools, public schools, businesses, college students, or rehabilitation centers. After the participants participated the ropes course and teambuilding activities, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the participants to rate their experience. There were approximately 70 participants tested on how Chumash Challenge Ropes Course impacted them on an emotional, physical, psychological, and mental level. The number of participants being tested were chosen by the convenience of people that would participate in the spring of 2010 and also, to have a large and diverse types of people. The subjects were selected because they participated in the Chumash Challenge Ropes Course because it was easily attained.

### Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was designed by whom to measure the impact of the Chumash Ropes Course. The questionnaire consisted of open and close-ended questions to better understand what the participant received from participating the ropes course and the teambuilding workshop. The instrument was organized by the ease of the questions, from ranks to open-ended questions in order to help the participant to answer the questions smoothly. There were a total of 14 questions on the survey for the participants to take. It was predicted that the instrument would take approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. The questions consisted of yes and no questions, satisfactory with the outcomes of certain activities, and the quality of the ropes course. All of the questions on the questionnaire helped the researcher to understand clearly how the ropes course affected the participant with each aspect of the body – physical, mental, emotional, and social. In order to assess the impact of the ropes course, each activity that took place at the Chumash was evaluated. Before distributing the questionnaires to the subjects, the researcher conducted a pilot test with 10 randomly selected students in and outside of the RPTA department. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee revised and approved the instrument and letter of informed consent. The consent form explained how the findings would be confidential, the risks that may occur, and whom to contact for any questions or concerns about the questionnaire. The informed consent form can be found in Appendix B.

### Description of Procedures

The researcher contacted the director of the Chumash Challenge Ropes Course and received permission to distribute the questionnaires to participants who were participating the ropes course and teambuilding workshops. The researcher then obtained a permission from organizations using the challenge course to distribute surveys to other members. The researcher also distributed a consent form to every participant to read before the participant completed the questionnaire. After the participants completed the entire ropes course and teambuilding workshops, the researcher then distributed a paper questionnaire, a pencil, and a clipboard to every individual who agreed to participate. The researcher collected the data 10 different days between February 15 and July, 2010. After collecting the data, the researcher thanked the leader and all the participants for their contributions.

### Method of Data Analysis

This study was conducted to better understand the impact each ropes course and teambuilding activity have on the participants in order to introduce to schools, afterschool programs, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and treatment centers the quality of recreation. Every individual learns differently; thus, the study would help certain individuals that have trouble learning through lectures to have a different opportunity to learn and overcome their personal struggles in an active way. This study also helped evaluate which activity fulfilled its own goals and which didn't in order to know if any changes needed to be done. Also, the study was conducted to determine if there was any relationship between the level of impact of the activities and the age of the participant. In

addition, the study determined whether there was a difference of impact between male and female participants.

Data were tabulated using Microsoft Excel. The first research question asked how and what types of ropes course and teambuilding activities are effective. Question 1, 2, and 9 answered the first research question. Questions 1 and 2 were calculated using the mean and standard deviation. As for question 9, it was calculated using frequency and percentage. The second question asked if the ropes course helped build the participant's self-esteem, self-confidence, social interaction, and decrease self-destructive behavior. Question 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 11 answers the second question. Questions 3 and 4 were calculated using the mean and standard deviation, while questions 5, 10, and 11 were calculated using frequency and percentage. Question 8 was sorted by common themes. The third question asked if the ropes course and team-building workshops inspired the participants to pursue their dreams and look forward to their future. Questions 6 and 7 answer the third question and both were calculated using frequency and percentage. Lastly, the final research question asked if age and gender played a role on the level of impact the ropes courses and teambuilding activities have. Questions 13 and 14 answer the final research questions. Question 13 was calculated using a T-test between males and females. Question 14 was calculated using the correlation between age and the way they answered the questions. For all the questions that were involved with the mean and standard deviation, when the mean was over 3, it indicates the participant's satisfactory.

## Chapter 3

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to assess the benefits and the impact of a ropes course and teambuilding activities have on the participants. This study was conducted during Spring and Summer of 2010 at San Luis Obispo, California, where the Evaluator took 120 subjects and tested the benefits and impact of a ropes course and teambuilding activities have on the participants.

#### Subject Demographics

Of the 120 subjects participating in the study, 63% were male and 37% were female ages between 12 and 50. The participants were tested during the teambuilding and ropes course at Chumash Challenge to determine the different physical, emotional, and mental level the course has on each participant. The

#### Ropes Course and Teambuilding Activities Effectiveness

Chumash Challenge offers a great range of different activities to their participants according to organization's specific goals and needs. In order to test which activities affected the participants, we asked two different questions to narrow down the results. The Evaluator asked the participants an open-ended question in listing two activities that were the most challenging to them and one that was their favorite. The results varied, but there were great commonality.

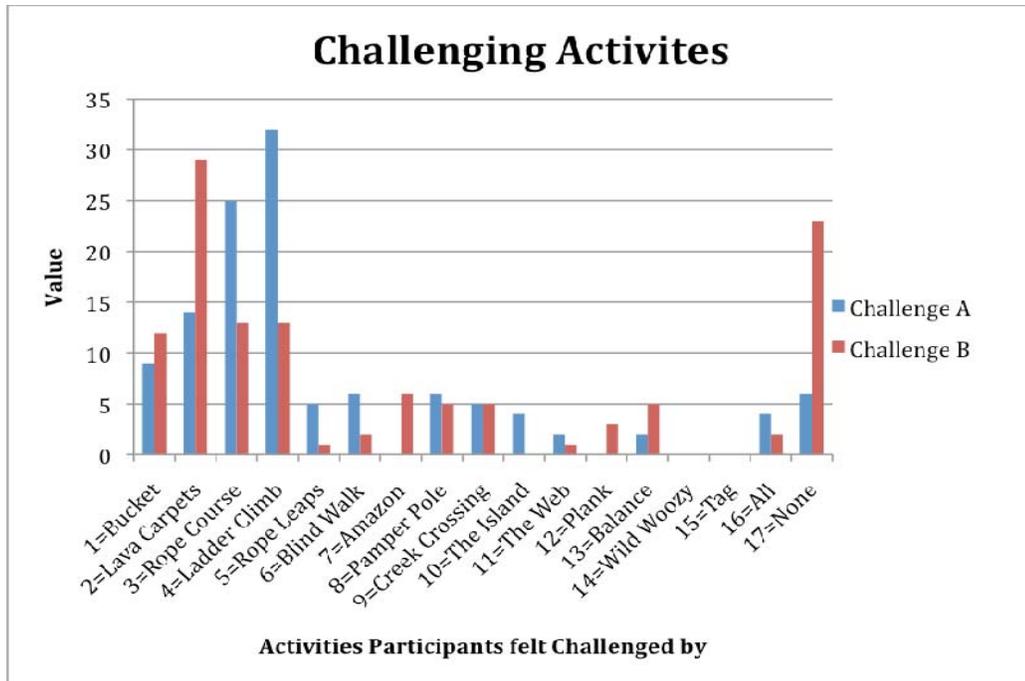
The Evaluator first went through each and every one of the questionnaires that the participants filled out and grouped the activities together. There were 17 common

activities that were listed as most challenging from the participants. The results were inputted on a program called Microsoft Excel. The names of the activities were listed as numbers to symbolize each of the activity. The following chart is the results of the common activities that the participants listed as challenging to them at Chumash Challenge.

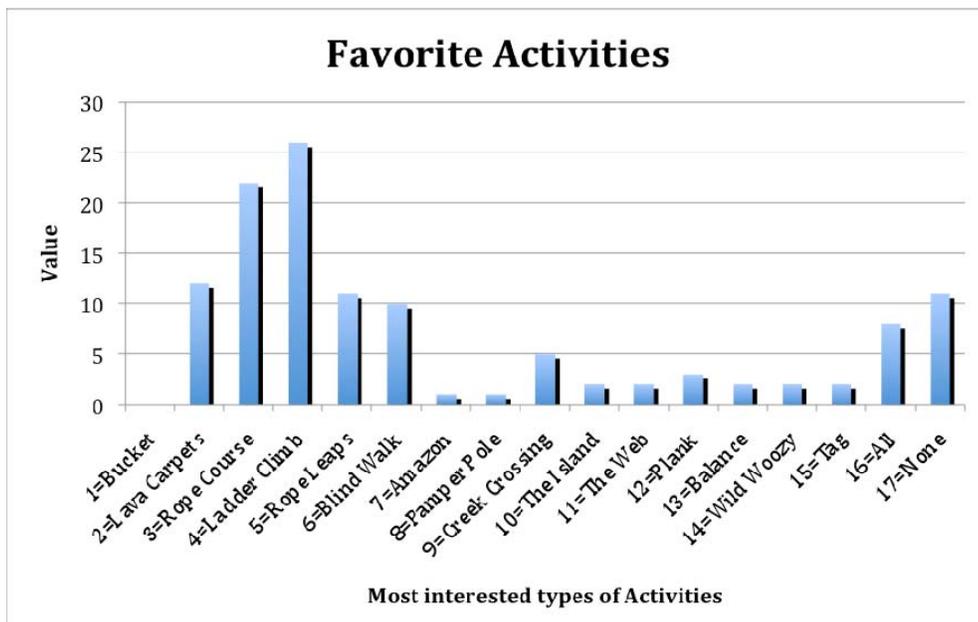
Number	Name of Activity
1	Bucket in the Creek
2	Lava Carpets
3	Ropes Course
4	Giants Ladder
5	Rope Leaps
6	Blindfold Trust Walk
7	Amazon
8	Pamper Pole
9	Creek Crossing

Number	Names of Activity
10	The Island
11	The Web
12	The Planks
13	Balancing Pole
14	Wild Woozy
15	Rooster Partner Tag
16	All
17	None

After combining the two activities that the participants listed as challenging, the data showed that the top challenging courses were: the Bucket in the Creek (21 participants), Lava Carpets (43), the Ropes Course (38), and Giants Ladder (45). A majority also listed that ‘none’ (29) of the activities were challenging. The least challenging activities were the Wild Woozy and the Rooster Partner Tag. The following graph reveals different rating of difficulty with each of the activity.



As for the activities that the participants indicated as one of their favorite activity, the majority listed the following as their favorite activity during their Chumash Challenge experience: the Ropes Course (22 participants), Ladder Climb (26), Lava Carpets (12), and Rope Leaps (11). The least favorite activity was the Bucket in the creek, but it was listed as one of the top challenging activity.



The two activities that were listed under both categories as a challenge and a favorite are the Ropes Course and the Lava Carpets. The activities that the participants listed as one of their challenges and/or favorite activity reveals the impact it has on the participants.

### Emotional and Social Affect

In order to test how Chumash Challenge activities impact the participant's mood, social skills, and internal being, the Evaluator developed a survey question with different outcomes and choices for the participant to choose. Participants were given the following categories to measure their social and emotional state after participating the teambuilding activities and ropes course: overcome fears, self-esteem, trust, cooperation, confidence, empathy, ease of stress, and positive outlook. Then the participants were given the following choices to evaluate the affect of the specific categories, which were: poor, below average, average, above average, and outstanding. The results were tabulated in Microsoft Excel and the data revealed that the majority saw an increase in their emotional and social skills. The data was calculated by totaling the numbers for each level that best fit the impact it had on the individual. Thus, participants that chose 'above average' or 'outstanding' were grouped together as being impacted in some way. As far with for those that chose 'below average' and 'poor' were grouped together as have little or no impact from the activities with the specific category. And participants that chose 'average' indicated that the activities did not increase nor decrease their emotions or social skills.

The following chart were the participant’s opinion of how Chumash Challenge affected their views, thoughts, and feelings of: overcoming fears, view of one’s self-esteem, the ability to trust one’s self and others, cooperating with others, finding confidence in one’s self, the ability to empathize, ease of stress, and having a positive outlook on life.

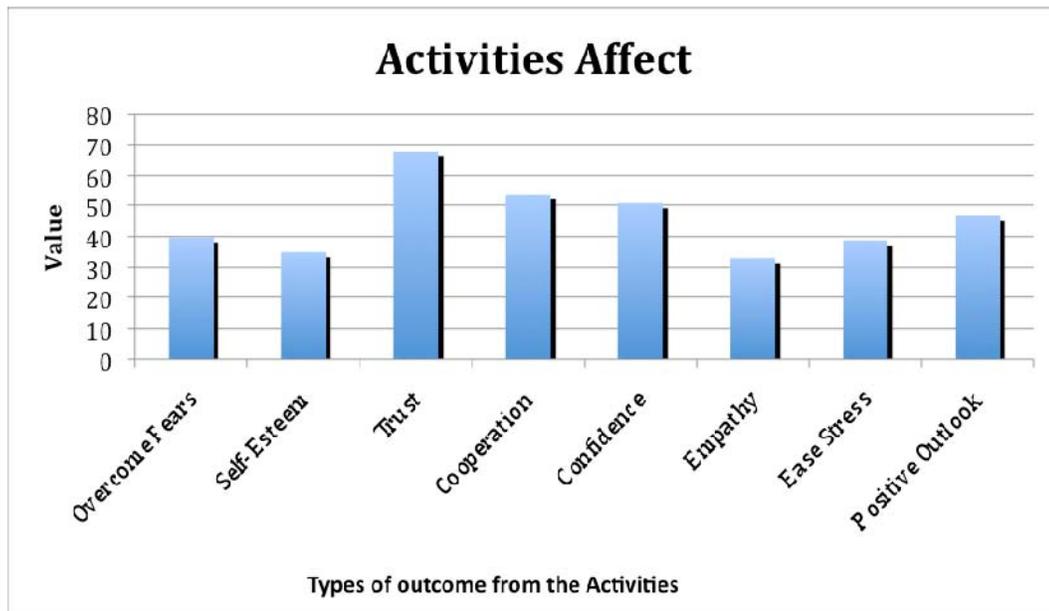
<b>Emotional And Social Affect Chart</b>					
	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Below Average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Above Average</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Overcome Fears</b>	7	9	25	39	40
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	3	7	34	41	35
<b>Trust</b>	1	0	15	36	68
<b>Cooperation</b>	1	0	15	50	54
<b>Confidence</b>	1	2	20	46	51
<b>Empathy</b>	2	8	27	50	33
<b>Ease Stress</b>	6	9	30	36	39
<b>Positive Outlook</b>	2	7	17	47	47

From the data, the majority of the participants indicated that Chumash Challenge had some type of an affect on each social and emotional category that was listed above. The amount of participants that indicated Chumash Challenge had some type of an impact on their emotional and social skills for each category were: overcome fears (79 participants), self-esteem (76), trust (104), cooperation (104), confidence (97), empathy (83), ease of stress (75), positive outlook on life (94).

The amount of participants that indicated Chumash Challenge had no impact on their emotional and social skills for each category were: overcome fears (16 participants), self-

esteem (10), trust (1), cooperation (1), confidence (3), empathy (10), ease of stress (15), and positive outlook on life (9).

The amount of participants that indicated Chumash Challenge did not increase nor decrease their emotions or social skills for each category were: overcome fears (25 participants), self-esteem (34), trust (15), cooperation (15), confidence (20), empathy (27), ease of stress (30), positive outlook on life (17).



According to the data, the top three categories that affected the participants emotionally and socially were: trust (104 participants), cooperation (104 participants), and confidence (97 participants). The least emotional and social impact the activities had on the participant was the 'ease of stress' category (75 participants).

### Increase Outlook on Life

To test and measure how the ropes courses and team-building activities inspired the participants to pursue their dreams and look forward to their future, the Evaluator included a direct question in the questionnaire. The participants were given the following choices to evaluate the affect of the question on their outlook on life, which were: poor, below average, average, above average, and outstanding. The results were tabulated in Microsoft Excel.

The following chart revealed that half of the 120 participants believed that the ropes course and/or teambuilding activities did not increase nor decrease their view of the future in choosing ‘average’ on the questionnaire (44 participants), while the other half believed that it did increased their outlook on life in choosing either ‘above average’ or ‘outstanding’ on the questionnaire (62 participants). The rest chose ‘below average’ or ‘poor’ indicating it did not have any affect on their outlooks on life (14 participants).

<b>Poor</b>	<b>Below Average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Above Average</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
5	9	44	34	28	120 Participants

In addition, the Evaluator included at a different section of the questionnaire if the ropes course and/or teambuilding activities increased their outlook on life in a positive way and 94 participants (78%) indicated that it did. However, the question did not ask if the course motivated them to pursue their dreams or look forward to the future. Thus, the ropes course has an impact of creating a positive outlook (78%), but not necessarily towards their dreams or future, which only 51% indicated that it did.

## Summary

The results revealed that Chumash Challenge had some level of impact on the participants not only physically, but also emotionally and socially. 87% participants indicated that the course increased their trust and cooperation level. 78% participants indicated that the ropes course and/or teambuilding activities increased their outlook on life in a positive way. 81% participants indicated their confidence level increased, while 63-70% participant's level with the removal of fears, stress, low self-esteem, and empathy increased. The top two favorite activities were the ropes courses and Lava Carpets, which were also the top two challenging activities that the participants indicated. From the data, it shows that placing the participants in challenging situations does increase their trust level with themselves and others.

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After inputting and analyzing the data, conclusions were drawn to assess what changes needed to be done or not to be done. Chumash Challenge provides a variety of activities, and this study provides a clear image of which activities have an impact on the participant.

#### Summary.

The purpose of the study was to assess the benefits and the impact of a ropes course and teambuilding activities have on the participants. This study was conducted at Chumash Challenge during spring and summer of 2010 at San Luis Obispo, California, where the Evaluator took 120 subjects and tested the benefits and impact of a ropes course and teambuilding activities have on the participants.

Recent studies have revealed the benefits and positive impact leisure has on individuals who participate in some type of non-work activities, such as sports, recreation, and fitness programs. Studies have showed that individuals who participate in some type of leisure activity have a higher job satisfaction rate and lower job absence than nonparticipants. These activities help individuals to recover from any psychological or emotional distress that may happen during their work or personal life.

Therapeutic recreation provides adequate care for any psychological, emotional, mental, or physical distress. Within the therapeutic recreation service are team-building activities and challenging ropes course. However, there is a wide range of activities within the field. It is important to identify which activities have a positive and negative impact to better serve the participant. Thus, this study was created to enhance the field of therapeutic

recreation, recovery, treatment, and afterschool programs. These programs can benefit in understanding which activities to incorporate in their facility.

The review of literature was formed through gathering information at the Robert E. Kennedy Library at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The purpose of the literature review was to understand more in depth the background of the ropes course and benefits of leisure activities that were covered within the study. After gaining knowledge of the subjects that were covered within the study, the methods and procedures were then identified.

The population of this study consisted of males and females, age 12 to 50 years old from the central coast of California. Participants came from a variety of organizations, such as: afterschool programs, businesses, college students, non-profit organizations, profit organizations, public school, private schools, and rehabilitation centers. After the participants experienced the ropes course and/or teambuilding activities, they had an opportunity to share their experience through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of open and closed-ended questions. There were a total of 14 questions organized by the ease of the questions, from ranks to open-ended questions. It was predicted that the instrument would take approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee revised and approved the instrument and letter of informed consent before distributing the questionnaire.

From the 120 participants that completed the questionnaire, results revealed that Chumash Challenge had some level of impact on the participants emotionally and socially. There were a great increase in participant's trust, cooperation with others, and self-confidence. The data also revealed that the participant's level of fear, stress, empathy, outlook on life, and self-esteem increased by more than 60%. The two top challenging activities were also considered participant's top two favorite activities, which indicate that

placing participants in challenging scenarios can leave a positive impact. The data has revealed that the ropes course and particular activities at Chumash Challenge has a positive, impacting affect on participants.

### Discussion.

The findings that were gain from the data revealed that placing participants in a group activity faced with a challenging task to accomplished together as a team increased participants' trust with one's self, cooperation with others, and self-confidence. In any type of setting, it's easier to care for one's own responsibilities, but when placed in a situation where you have to depend on one another, it allows the participant to see that there is room to trust and cooperate with others. During the study, the Evaluator not only distributed the questionnaire but also observed some of the activities the participants were in. From the Evaluator's observation, participants were all presented to at least one type of activity that gives them an opportunity to take risks, overcome past fears, and work with the entire group and/or another member.

The participants had an opportunity to identify which activities affected them through answering an open-ended question. The data were grouped to top activities that the participants listed, which were: the Bucket in the Creek, Lava Carpets, Giants Ladder, Rope Leaps, Blindfold Trust Walk, Amazon, Pamper Pole, Creek Crossing, the Island, the Web, the Planks, Balancing Pole, Wild Woozy, Rooster Partner Tag, and the Ropes Course. The participants were exposed to a variety of different activities, but these were the ones that left a large impact. From observing the data, it shows that these activities are effective and worth keeping to incorporate for future workshops.

The data also revealed that participant's outlook on life did increase, but not necessarily motivate them to pursue their dreams. This shows that Chumash Challenge can be a good first step for individuals that may have low self-esteem or outlook on life to participate, especially for afterschool or rehabilitation programs. Once these participants are placed in scenarios that allow them to physically and visually see that they're capable to overcome a challenge on their own and with others, it can increase one's outlook on life.

The findings did parallel with previous research, which indicated that ropes course are used to improve self-esteem confidence, and teambuilding skills. The goal of ropes courses is to transfer participant's experience from the ropes course to their everyday lives. The participant's top increase were trust, cooperation, and confidence, which parallel with the ropes course goals. The study's current findings give confirmation to Chumash Challenge that the activities and staff are fulfilling their goals.

There were great limitations in collecting the data. It was expected that during the months of February and May to be the busy season, but unexpectedly Chumash Challenge were not receiving much requests during those particular months. Therefore, the collection of data ended up prolonging to August 2010 to receive enough participants. Another limitation was certain participants not completely filling out the questionnaire. There were a few questionnaires that were half completed, which ended up not being used. From the half-completion, it took a longer time to retrieve the appropriate amount of data. Another limitation was not having proportional female and male participants. 63% were male and 37% female, which made the data not completely equal. However, in the end, the staffs of Chumash Challenge were cooperative in allowing the Evaluator to distribute the questionnaires even after the expected date to completely collect the data.

The findings gave great confirmation to Chumash Challenge that their activities and staff are achieving their goal of impacting participants at an emotional, social, mental, and physical level. Afterschool programs, businesses, profit and non-profit organizations, public and private schools, and rehabilitation centers can have tangible facts that the ropes course can help individuals to trust, overcome past fears, gain confidence, and increase teambuilding skills. The findings will allow Chumash Challenge staff to recognize which activities to continue, how to incorporate them in future workshops, and which types of organizations can benefit from the Chumash Challenge Ropes Course.

## Conclusions.

Based on the findings of this study, conclusions are drawn that Chumash Challenge's ropes course and teambuilding activities do have an impact on participants at an emotional and social level. The ropes course and teambuilding activities increased participants' level of trust, confidence, and cooperation. The activities that affected the participants are: the Bucket in the Creek, Lava Carpets, Giants Ladder, Rope Leaps, Blindfold Trust Walk, Amazon, Pamper Pole, Creek Crossing, the Island, the Web, the Planks, Balancing Pole, Wild Woozy, Rooster Partner Tag, and the Ropes Course. Lastly, participating Chumash Challenge do enhance participants' outlook on life.

## Recommendations.

Based on the conclusions of this study, some following recommendations were made by the Evaluator: to continue to incorporate the top activities that were found through the study into future workshops (which were: the Bucket in the Creek, Lava Carpets, Giants Ladder, Rope Leaps, Blindfold Trust Walk, Amazon, Pamper Pole, Creek Crossing, the Island, the Web, the Planks, Balancing Pole, Wild Woozy, Rooster Partner Tag, and the Ropes Course); to continue to incorporate group scenarios; to continue to give inspiring reflective questions and conclusions after every activity; to continue to conduct an in-depth study after every 3-5 years to determine the impact of the activities and for further improvements.

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## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIXES

Appendix A  
Questionnaire



## CHUMASH CHALLENGE: Ropes Course & Teambuilding Survey



To assist us in our efforts to assess the impact of the ropes course and teambuilding activities, please take a few moments to complete this survey. Your responses are strictly anonymous and your participation is completely voluntary. Thank you for your time and participation.

1. How satisfied were you with the ice-breaker game when it came to bonding?

very dissatisfied     dissatisfied     neutral     satisfied     very satisfied

2. How well did today's activity increase your trust with your group members?

Poor     Below Average     Average     Above Average     Outstanding

If so, which activity (WRITE NAME OF GAME): \_\_\_\_\_

3. How well did today's activities help remove past fears?

Poor     Below Average     Average     Above Average     Outstanding

If yes, which game/activity(s): \_\_\_\_\_

4. How did your ability to work with others increase?

Poor     Below Average     Average     Above Average     Outstanding

If yes, which game/activity: \_\_\_\_\_

5. After participating in the Chumash Challenge Ropes Course, how well did your outlook in life change?

Poor     Below Average     Average     Above Average     Outstanding

If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How well did today's activities motivate you to be ambitious in pursuing your dreams/hobbies?

Poor     Below Average     Average     Above Average     Outstanding

If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What were the two most challenging activities?

a)

b)

Why were they challenging for you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(\*MORE ON NEXT PAGE\* →)

8. What was your favorite activity you did today? \_\_\_\_\_  
 And why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

9. How much did you get out of by participating in the ropes course and/or teambuilding activities?  
**CIRCLE** on the following:

	Poor		Average		Outstanding
Overcoming Fear	1	2	3	4	5
Increase self-esteem	1	2	3	4	5
Trust	1	2	3	4	5
Cooperation	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence	1	2	3	4	5
Empathy	1	2	3	4	5
Ease Stress	1	2	3	4	5
Positive Outlook on Life	1	2	3	4	5
Other:	1	2	3	4	5

10. If I can redo the activities again, what would I wish I had done more:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

11. Based on your participation at Chumash Challenge, how much would you recommend others to participate? **CIRCLE ONE:**

Never                      Average                      Greatly  
 1                      2                      3                      4                      5

If never, why?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

13. Any suggestions of the ropes course or teambuilding activities, feel free to share:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

14. Group/Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Workshop Attended (please circle):

Teambuilding                      High Ropes                      Combo

16. Age: \_\_\_\_

17. Gender: M \_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_

**Thank you!** 😊

Appendix B  
Informed Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE IMPACT OF EACH ROPES COURSE AND TEAMBUILDING ACTIVITIES AT CHUMASH CHALLENGE AT CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN LUIS OBISPO.

A research project on challenge ropes courses and teambuilding activities is being conducted by Jenny Phan in the Department of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how each ropes course and teambuilding activity impact on the participant's well being.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached/enclosed questionnaire(s). Please read the questions and respond to the best of your ability and as accurately as possible. Your participation will take approximately 5-10 minutes after participating the entire ropes course and teambuilding activity. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire(s) you prefer not to answer.

The possible risks associated with participation in this study include minimal risks. If you should experience any issues, please be aware that you may contact the Cal Poly Health Center at (805) 756-1211 or by email at [health-counseling@calpoly.edu](mailto:health-counseling@calpoly.edu) for assistance.

Your responses will be provided anonymously to protect your privacy. Potential benefits associated with the study include the possible of incorporating ropes courses and teambuilding activities in schools, rehabilitation centers, afterschool programs, and hospitals to provide more opportunities of learning for individuals who do not fit the traditional system of learning.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Jenny Phan at (925) 321-6097 or by e-mail at [jephan@calpoly.edu](mailto:jephan@calpoly.edu). If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at 756-2754, [sdavis@calpoly.edu](mailto:sdavis@calpoly.edu), or Dr. Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at 756-1508, [sopava@calpoly.edu](mailto:sopava@calpoly.edu).

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by completing and returning the attached questionnaire. Please retain this consent cover form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.