The Lived Experience. The Boundary Waters as a lived experience was a time to meet people and explore relationships. Camping with people I have not met is rare for me. The social dynamics were something about which I spent a lot of time thinking (and writing) throughout the trip. Although not the case in the Boundary Waters, under some circumstances a week in the woods (alone together) could have been a very long week. My lived experience was one of being a member of a group of people getting to know each other.

The Boundary Waters as a lived experience was a reacquaintance with my basic senses. Sounds, sights, smells and various touch and bodily sensations were rediscovered. In everyday life between home and office, it is rare to feel blisters or cut skin, muscles aching from use, smells of the earth, an open campfire, and the brush of wind and sun around my skin. Daily life is being enclosed in places without bugs, sweat, worries about my next meal, and expectations of clean and safe sleeps each night; bathing and washing are repeated routines that scrub away dirt. For most things that maintain my everyday comfort level, I simply take-out my wallet and buy what I need. The hermetic situations of daily life have deprived my senses from a full range of operation. The Boundary Waters awakened me to my senses and to their own limitations.

The Boundary Waters as a lived experience was an immersion into my basic senses. Canoeing across the lakes fixed on my paddle in the water, trudging the portages balancing my load with careful steps, scanning for take-outs having scanned the map -- these activities required a level of sensory alert and self-reliance far beyond that of daily life. The mysteries of shadows in the water, unexpected warmth in the muck, and various sounds in the woods, all attracted attention and called for resolution. Feeding appetites and quenching thirsts were the focus of extraordinary amounts of behavior. Meal preparations were not casual concerns, but usually communal affairs that held a sense of primacy. To travel and camp in the Boundary Waters was to be swallowed into a sensual journey.

The Boundary Waters as a lived experience was a celebration of my basic senses and capabilities. What would have been dirt back home, was the welcomed trace of the woods on my clothes and skin. What otherwise would be sweat-stained shirts, was the comfort of many successful portages behind us. What others might turn-away as taco-less tacos, was a delectable dish that punctuated our collective bear-survivalism. Many situations in the Boundary Waters demanded physical involvement and challenged our faculties, which in turn, fostered a pride and wit about the extent of our resourcefulness.

The Boundary Waters as a lived experience involved some sensations of what might be an epiphany. Throughout the trip, the waters were inviting: they tasted fresh; they were cool and soothing to the touch. To my ears, the waters kept lapping on the shore or flirting with my paddle. The message was unmistakable: I need to go inside this lake. The anatomy of a swim has the following highlights: Moments before the plunge, I sense the flow of blood in my body. Upon entry, the dark, clear
water is a cold embrace, that's smooth and yielding. Fears of being captured by the depths below, dissolve as I turn upwards. Upon breaking the surface from below, I feel -- at that moment of bursting-out -- alive for the first time. The place to capture the meaning of "sublime", is while answering the call of the northern lakes. And later warmed by the sun, the wind, and the rock on which I sit. Why does my skin feel so good?

The Reflected Experience. The Boundary Waters as a reflected experience is about the friendship between Bruce and me. We have many memories together of times shared prior to the Boundary Waters trip. After he moved from Texas, I haven't had the opportunity to enjoy his company. His quick wit, high energy, and challenging ways were a joy to experience once again. I wonder what he's doing now? I'd like to see Liz and the kids. Reflecting on the Boundary Waters, I cannot help but think about my friendship with Bruce.

The Boundary Waters as reflected experience is about the people I met and the friendships in the making. As my tent partner and fellow emergency-rescue volunteer, Bill and I spent extensive amount of time with one another that would be unheard of under daily life situations. Some people count sheep, we counted mosquitoes on our tent screen before settling to sleep. We enjoyed our lazy day marooned on Tuscarora Lake, with periodic swims, and the start of a friendship. I wondered about his first day on the job; I bet he likes Missoula. Then there is Norm and Birgit with their wonderful accents and friendly smiles. Have they made any raisin-pancakes in Sweden? Are her kidneys okay?

Walter also left early -- and we were just getting acquainted. When I see each of them again, I will have a chance to explore our relationships further. Reflecting on the Boundary Waters, I came to know a lot of people. What are they doing now?

The Boundary Waters as a reflected experience is a collage of great swims in cold, dark, clear lakes. Who is in those lakes now? What will the shorelines look like in autumn? My final swim in Lake Superior is a distinctive farewell; the feeling of Gitche Gumee stayed with me for quite sometime afterwards. I long for the cold waters and warm sun of the north country.

The encounter with the bear has been a recurrent event in my thoughts. When people have asked me about my trip, they invariably have asked about wildlife sightings. The bear episode is recounted within such contexts. But when I reflect upon the experience of the episode, I think less about the bear and its potentiality, and more about our pot-banging parades around the campsite, the bonding that followed, and the cooling storm that brought the episode to its end. As a reflected experience, the bear is not so much a wildlife encounter as it is an ice-breaker for the social dynamics on our first night out; a catalyst to develop interpersonal ties and bonding to the whole.

Key Concepts. Although other concepts could be inferred from my diary notes, three are central to characterizing the content of my Boundary Waters' experience: (1) social dynamics of being alone together, (2) consciousness of sensory information, and (3) awareness of accomplishments. These three concepts are not exhaustive of key concepts associated with other
backcountry trips that I have taken: these concepts are suggested as being critical to describing my Boundary Waters' experience this past summer.

"Alone together" in the Boundary Waters is an important aspect of the trip. Expectations for the trip were that my activity group would spend seven days together, with some planned (but limited) interaction with the other group. Besides the limited interaction with the other group, there would not be any social forces to buffer or directly shape the development of our group reality. We would need to rely solely on ourselves to maintain and develop relations with one another. With previous backcountry trips, the development of a group reality (that lasts long after the trip) has been an integral part of both the lived and reflected experience. Being alone together is something that most people recognize prior to venturing into the backcountry and there is usually a desire, if not an immediacy, about establishing esprit de corps. Although group realities are formed in other contexts, they usually take longer to develop, have less endurance, and do not have the quality of being cut-off from social interaction extraneous to the group.

An appreciation for my "senses" and their full range of operation was an important aspect of the trip. I sensed and felt things that were outside the everyday range. Touch, taste, smell, hearing and seeing were fully exercised and required an unusual degree of alertness while in the Boundary Waters. In part, these sensations provoked thoughts beyond the scope of everyday thoughts. I do not usually ponder bugs, blisters, jumping in lake water, maintaining a campfire, or the need to fetch water. Although other places also exercise senses and provoke thought, such sensations and thoughts are closer to the scope of everyday occurrences.

Feelings of "accomplishment" are related to reliance on one's senses and capabilities. In everyday life, one usually can purchase something wanted or to prevent the occurrence of something unwanted. In the Boundary Waters, there was a higher degree of self-reliance required: what is a simple purchase on the outside (for a meal, transportation, or a place to stay), becomes a personalized quest that requires a fuller use of one's senses and focused attention. Basic functions of eating, sleeping, and traveling required thought and effort to carry-out and resulted in feelings of accomplishment. There were various degrees of pride associated with our meal preparations, our successful travels over many portages, our search for good campsites, and our skills in camping and canoeing. Such feelings do not usually accompany the same functions in everyday life, due to both ease of attainment and lack of involvement in their production processes. Although one might argue that feelings of accomplishment are largely self-congratulatory, and that decisions were set-up to be self-fulfilling, the feelings of accomplishment and self-reliance are nonetheless real. Although feelings of accomplishment emerge in other contexts, such feelings probably would be associated with accomplishments other than physiological functioning.