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Wilderness therapy and spirituality

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Lauren Rothwell
Wilderness Therapy and Spirituality

ABSTRACT

Wilderness therapy is a therapeutic process intended for young people struggling with a variety of mental health concerns. There is limited research about this rapidly growing treatment modality, but what is known is that wilderness therapy seems to be one of the best way to positively effect young people because of the research regarding recidivism rates, symptom reduction and client/parent reports. Specifically within wilderness therapy research, this study looks at the possibility of spirituality as a factor of the wilderness therapy process. Spirituality also seems to be a concept that has crept into therapeutic work at a rate ahead of known research about it. The research states that most Americans encounter spirituality in their lives, but most therapists do not feel prepared to address it. This study attempts to examine both concepts of wilderness therapy and spirituality in a therapeutic process with the question, "Can spirituality be a part of wilderness therapy?"

To most appropriately answer this question, the researcher interviewed 12 wilderness therapy staff members who had significant time with the students. The interviews revealed that spirituality is not currently addressed in these programs in any planned, structured way. However, the data reported that spirituality still seems to be a function of wilderness therapy that allows students to grow therapeutically in ways that parallel the goals for these wilderness therapy programs. In turn, it also seems that the structure of the programs, especially working intimately with nature, facilitated opportunities for students to have spiritual experiences and exposure.

WILDERNESS THERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people who have been an essential part of my journey writing this thesis. I'll start with a big thanks to my family and especially my mother who volunteered to edit my thesis. I also want to thank my friend Dr. Tiffany Schiffner because of her encouragement and dedication to hard work. I, course, could not have created this thesis without the patience and careful guidance of my thesis advisor Dr. Jay Williams. I would also like to thank my wonderful friends at Smith were an amazing support network as we all waded through this journey in our own ways.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Wilderness therapy is a concept that even people within the therapy profession have heard little about. It is slowly carving out a small corner of psychotherapy and is especially helpful for adolescent boys and girls struggling with mental health issues that are causing behavioral concerns (Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002). Wilderness therapy is structured in many different ways, but essentially removes young people from their environments that are deemed negative and places them in novel outdoor environments. The duration of stay in these outdoor environments may be anywhere from several weeks to two years. They may look mostly residential with wilderness experiences interlaced into the program, or they may be backpacking experiences completely emerged in the woods. Some of the goals of the program are pushing the students to new levels of self-discovery, forming new behavioral habits and learning new skills that will make them more successful in their communications and interactions with others. These programs also aim to transition students back to their original environments in a way that will create successful paths for them after their wilderness therapy experiences.

Even though wilderness therapy has been making its mark for over 25 years, there is not an abundant amount of literature on the topic (Powch, 1994). The literature that is available creates an important foundation that this research project will build on. The literature suggests that wilderness therapy can be more affective for adolescents than any other traditional therapy model. Researcher suggests that wilderness therapy is worth

continuing to examine because of its promising statistics on symptom reduction and recidivism for appropriate cliental (Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002; Russell, 2003; Williams, 2000).

This project will continue to build on already existing knowledge with a qualitative examination of wilderness therapy. The researcher will specifically delve into the possibility of spirituality dwelling in the wilderness therapy process. This is a subject with little to no research previously existing. Spirituality is something that can arguably be found in most arenas of life. It often emerges in traditional therapy sessions although it is often skirted around or glossed over for a number of reasons (Walker et al 2003; Pargament 2001. This study explores the possibility that spirituality can be found in wilderness therapy as well. Several researchers argue that nature is a key component to connection with spirituality, and some go so far as to say it is necessary (Burton, 2002; Powch, 1994; Stone, 1971). Given this information, it is worth investigating whether forms of spirituality are present in wilderness therapy programs. This question was explored by interviewing wilderness therapy counselors. These participants work and live with students in their programs and have the most exposure to the experiences students have while in the programs.

This paper will first review the literature regarding wilderness therapy. Because no research was found that specifically addressees spirituality in wilderness therapy, literature addressing spirituality in traditional therapy will be reviewed. In addition, spirituality in wilderness will also be explored. Finally, the literature review will pull together research that suggests that wilderness therapy could be fostering spirituality because of some similar elements. This review sets the stage to investigate how

spirituality does emerge in wilderness therapy. In further exploration, this study asks if wilderness therapy is an appropriate place for spirituality. It explores whether spiritual experiences can be harvested to benefit students. Conversely, it explores how these experiences could be harmful for students.

It is beneficial for wilderness therapy to explore issues that have not been addressed in research previously. This study is an avenue for wilderness therapy programs to continue to grow as they evaluate what specific elements are holding back and or contributing to the success of the students they serve. In addition, spirituality is a topic that clinicians in all types of therapy struggle to address. This research addresses this often avoided topic directly. It seeks to advance the understanding of clinicians within and outside of wilderness therapy on creative ways to explore and utilize spirituality in their work. It is a hope of the researcher that students in these wilderness therapy programs will benefit from this exploratory study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will introduce the concepts of wilderness therapy and spirituality. It will also give evidence to the importance of both concepts in mental health. In addition, this author will introduce the argument that spirituality may have a place in wilderness therapy.

Wilderness therapy, although a continually evolving therapy, has roots that date back to the 1920's in Germany and 1962 in US history (Powch, 1994). Throughout this evolution, many concepts were introduced and expanded upon to divide the therapy into different specific practices (i.e. adventure therapy, outdoor behavioral therapy and experiential therapy). Wilderness therapy has yet to do much expansion with the ideas of melding spirituality and outdoor experiences. Without the therapeutic component, however, spirituality and outdoor experiences blend frequently within organized religions and spiritual affiliations (Balles, 2004; Hunter & Sawyer, 2006; McFague, 1997). Furthermore, without the wilderness component, research shows that therapeutic practices sometimes bring spirituality into the room (Pargament, 2001; Gollnick). However, it is argued that the integration of spirituality into the therapy is rare when compared to the number of clinicians and clients who identify with a certain religion or spirituality (Walker, et. al., 2004; Pargament, 2001). So even though one does not see spirituality structured into wilderness therapy programs, one sees spirituality emerge in both wilderness and therapy separately.

Before proceeding, it is paramount that the very concept of spirituality be clarified. Crossley and Salter (2005) collect a variety of definitions to wrestle with. They sum up the meaning by saying that spirituality is "the perspective or aspect in which the world is held distinct from the content of life (Hayes, 1984), or to a quest for meaning that is beyond the material aspects and the impermanence of things in life (Nino, 1997)." This understanding is most congruent with the idea that will be appropriate for this study. In summation, spirituality is the not only the belief that there are other powers outside of the life that one knows, but that as people who identify spiritually, there is a quest for meaning in this belief.

Specifically this project will look at the available research relating to wilderness therapy and spirituality in therapy and use both of these concepts to build new ideas about integrating the two. The new ideas will be uncovered through interviews of wilderness therapy field staff who work closest with the youth in the wilderness therapy programs.

Wilderness Therapy

Wilderness therapy programs essentially involve four aspects: 1) emersion into a wilderness setting; 2) living with peers; 3) group and individual therapeutic processes and 4) outdoor and psycho education. Staff use these aspects to identify and work on behavioral issues, improve social skills and improve emotional identification and regulation (Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002).

Wilderness therapy is an evolving therapy and falls under several different names. In an effort to structure the confusing labeling, wilderness therapy and its cousins adventure therapy and experimental education all fall under OBT (outdoor behavioral

therapy) as of the 1996 Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Industry Counsel (Russell, 2003).

However wilderness therapy will be the specific model focused on in this paper.

Wilderness therapy was modeled based on Outward Bound, which now inspires

people to discover themselves through exposure to wilderness challenges ("Outward

Bound," 2007). Originally, Outward Bound aimed to prepare British seamen to endure

the voyage at sea in 1942. Even before this, Kurt Hahn, in Germany, first created the idea

of experiential education in the 1920's based on his theory that values such as

compassion and tenacity could be best learned though experience (Powch, 1994). The

theories developed by Hahn and Outward Bound evolved over time to create the

wilderness therapy model used today. Williams (2000) and Fletcher and Hinkle (2002)

argue that wilderness therapy also has roots from Dr. MacDonald in 1901 at the New

York Asylum. He made the decision to move psychiatric patients to the lawns in tents to

alleviate overcrowding. Doctors were shocked to see improvement in the conditions of

these patients and the concept of "tent therapy" was introduced. Wilderness therapy has

moved far beyond tent therapy. In addition to the criteria mentioned earlier, there are

additional factors that must be considered to bring an intentional therapeutic focus to the

work. Russell and Phillips-Miller (2002) carefully outline what these considerations

should be:

> a) the design of the program should be therapeutically based, with the
> assumptions made clear and concise, in order to best determine target outcomes
> and evaluate the effectiveness of treatment b) the careful selection of candidates
> should be based on a clinical assessment and should include the creation of an
> individual treatment plan for each participant c) the provision of individual and
> group psychotherapy should be facilitated by qualified individual professionals,
> with an evaluation of an individual's progress a critical component of the
> program, and d) at the conclusion of the program, qualified staff should work with

appropriate professionals to create an aftercare plan that is best suited for the individual to maintain any therapeutic progress that has been made.

Williams also adds that wilderness therapy works especially well for adolescents because of their developmental stage. Their minds sometimes work within concrete operations, depending on their progression from concrete to abstract thinking, and they are commonly drawn to high-risk activities.

Those criteria laid out by Russell and Phillips-Miller for wilderness therapy are based on a model that can not always be implemented according to protocol, but research does indicate that wilderness therapy is, in general, effective for symptom reduction and recidivism and can be more effective than traditional styles of therapy when working with young people (Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002; Russell, 2003; Williams, 2000). In one example, Russell studied adolescents in a 45-day program. He surveyed clients and their parents at admission and termination of the program. Russell found that symptoms of behavior disorders, substance abuse and mood disorders not only reduced significantly over the period of time, but that these symptom reductions were maintained 12 months out of treatment (Russell, 2003). In addition, Russell (2003) reports that more than 100 programs now exist and serve more than 10,000 clients a year, so as the efficacy reputation strengthens so does the popularity. These studies strengthen the evidence that youth respond well to learning experientially versus the traditional indoor talk therapy. Russell and Phillips-Miller (2002) also add to the evidence of the efficacy of wilderness therapy. Their research indicated that the basic components of wilderness therapy already defined (exercise, primitive camping, peer relationship building and group building, plus

the relationship formed with therapeutic field staff) all contributed significantly as positive-change elements for the enrolled youth (Russell and Phillips-Miller, 2002).

The last component was especially salient for many of the youth and is a theme for many therapeutic programs. Many researchers agree that the relationship between wilderness counselors and youth is crucial to success for these youth (Williams, 2002; Lyman, et al, 1989; Fletcher and Hinkle, 2002). Youth feel a special bond as a result of the intimate situation in which the wilderness counselors and client find themselves. Many standard barriers for this kind of relationship are broken down when staff and youth are living in the same environment and accomplishing wilderness challenges together. Williams adds that the relationship a student experiences is powerful and is especially helpful for "needy" or at risk teens. According to Lyman, et al (1989), the wilderness counselors can be significant role models who approach the relationship with their youth with little hierarchy. As the youth enter the wilderness, they come to rely on their wilderness counselors for guidance in their experience as trust begins to build. According to Fletcher and Hinkle (2002), these are just a few of the many skills needed in a successful wilderness counselor. He adds that pushing youth to attempt challenges that the student finds too risky is important, and a skilled understanding of the therapist to know when to push and when to initiate "challenge by choice" for the youth is crucial to holding both the trusting relationship and being therapeutically helpful to the student.

In addition to wilderness breaking down barriers in a therapeutic relationship, wilderness also serves to challenge youth in this program and awaken them to a larger sense of self. This is often seen in the solo expeditions that are structured into many programs. Lyman et al (1989) would go so far as to say that a spiritual experience

happens for many youth in wilderness therapy programs as they spend more time in the wilderness and on some unconscious level, regard it as a sacred space.

Spirituality and therapy

In 2002, PBS's program NOW, "Society and Community" included a statistic that claimed 87% of Americans consider themselves religious (Moyers, 2002). Holding to this assumption, this research poses the broad question; whether spiritual issues and conversations are being addressed in therapeutic sessions in quantities that line up with the needs of people who identify spiritually. Walker et al. (2004), Davis et al. (2003) and Pargament (2001) make a case that there are significant reasons for incorporating spirituality into therapy on a more regular basis. Mainly, spirituality shows positive outcome in subjective well-being, self-esteem and physical health (Davis et al., 2003). Interestingly, this is closely related to some of the main benefits of wilderness therapy mentioned earlier. This may lead one to wonder what the potential may be for helping youth in wilderness programs if these two forces where combined. Walker et al. contend that this idea has a long way to go because spirituality is under utilized and under addressed even in the traditional therapeutic setting. Pargament states that much of this is not happening due to a lack of interest on the part of the therapist to reach out to the religious community. With more collaborating between the spiritual and mental health communities, Pargament suggests several techniques that could be helpful. These include using the religious definition of forgiveness to help clients move from painful pasts, using culturally religious rituals that may help with transitions and introducing meditation as a method of anxiety reduction.

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The findings of Walker et al. (2004) suggest that those therapists who do consider themselves religious are more willing to use spiritual methods in therapy and address spiritual subjects than their non-religious counterparts. Crossley and Salter (2005) support this statement with their research that indicates that one deterrent for approaching spirituality in the therapy room is that therapists don't have a consistent idea of what spirituality means and what an approach looks like. They site that it is the therapists' own relationships with spirituality that hinders them from approaching it in their therapeutic settings more so than education about the issue.

Spirituality in wilderness

For the purposes of simplicity, wilderness and nature will be used interchangeably. Wilderness or nature interacts with spirituality on many levels. It is both a foundation from which spirituality is built and a component of how spirituality is practiced (Burton, 2002; Powch, 1994; Stone, 1971). Besthorn (2002a) speaks to the necessity of awareness of nature to be able to achieve a holistic self. He also brings in a historical perspective regarding the origins as a human race to innately look outward to nature to meet all of its needs and use these gifts as a way to access spirituality with a love and respect of all nature has to offer (Besthorn, 2002a, 2002b). From a theoretical perspective, Besthorn (2002b) introduces the idea of biophilia:

> …human beings not only derive specific aesthetic benefits from interacting with nature but that the human species has an instinctive, genetically-determined need to deeply affiliate with natural settings and life forms…. The desire to affiliate with other sentient, nonhuman organisms and ecosystems and the response people have to them is innately biological and intensely emotional. The human response to these affiliations has complex benefits, which not only enhance our psychic and physical well-being but are critical to our continued survival as a species. (p. 19)

In essence, he argues that not only is nature important to spirituality, but necessary for all aspects of human life.

More specifically though, what does wilderness evoke in one to reach ones spiritual self? This body of research argues that nature evokes roots in specific belief systems, spiritual inspiration and values of responsibility as spiritual beings (Besthorn, 2002; Burton, 2002; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Hageneder, 2001; Powch, 1994; Stone, 1971). From a Biblical perspective, nature is a gift from God and, as the prophets would say, something that He controls, and humans are a part of this process (Stone, 1971). This is a foundation for beliefs of Christianity based on the respect and power of nature. From a Native American spirituality, nature brings contemplation and connection between them and the spiritual world. There are many specific rituals that are enmeshed with nature. Two examples of this would be the burying of the placenta so that the new child and earth may be connected, and rites of passages for youth in nature (Burton, 2002).

Many people talk about being spiritually inspired by wilderness (Burton, 2002; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Hageneder, 2001). One particular study conducted by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) examined two groups of women sent on wilderness expeditions and asked to keep journals of their thoughts and experiences. They were asked follow up questions. Most participants reported that the actual experience of seeing new and powerful views of nature and the experience of being in a group during this experience inspired them spiritually. These women report that they were able to take the inspirations with them after the termination of the trip. In, addition, many reported a "religious or spiritual experience" after working through a particularly difficult physical

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challenge that their wilderness trip provided (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). Hageneder

(2001) also writes hundreds of pages about the spiritual inspiration found in trees.

> I felt that my life could not be beautiful without the existence of something greater
> and wiser than me. I looked to the tree again and unconsciously surrendered to its
> divine source of inspiration. (p. 11).

Again "spiritual experiences" are touched on in Native Indian spirituality, from

the perspective of the author, Burton (2002), who was able to join in on a ceremony. He

discusses being removed from his current mindset and placed in a beautiful setting in

nature and the spiritual inspiration this brought.

Finally, wilderness also provokes a sense of values represented by particular

spiritualities based about responsibility and respect for all parts of Earth. Again, Burton

(2002) touches on this with his experience with Native Indians as they believe one cares

for where one came from (Earth) as that is where one will return.

Spirituality as a part of wilderness therapy

Previously mentioned research indicates that the wilderness component of

wilderness therapy is an effective therapeutic process. In addition, Lyman and Prentice-

Dunn argue a number of reasons why the wilderness setting is essential. These include:

an absence of modern stimuli, the enforcement of natural consequences and the positive

reinforcement of success and mastery through wilderness challenges. The spirituality

section makes a case that wilderness is also an essential part of spirituality. With this

overlap of wilderness in both therapy and spirituality, does spirituality enter the

wilderness therapeutic process naturally? Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) discuss a

finding that states that wilderness experiences create extreme states of mindsets and

senses that lead to more meaningful experiences. Wilderness experience is differentiated

from nature as an actual experience interacting with wilderness on some level (i.e. camping, solo expeditions, etc). These extreme states of consciousness and sensory awareness are found here to lead to a personal sense of spiritual inspiration (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

Powch (1994) also claims that the essence of wilderness therapy includes a healing process on a spiritual level where the self realizes its connection with powers and forces greater than itself. She also states that it is the role of the wilderness therapist in this spiritual growth process to help guide and facilitate. These referenced studies indicate that not only is spirituality a part of the wilderness therapeutic experience, but that it cannot be separated from or ignored. Besthorn (2002a) backs this theory up with his research on self-identity in youth as it relates to wilderness therapeutic experiences. His research includes quotes from youth about how they feel nature-focused spiritual experiences in their bodies. " 'I just know it.' 'I can just feel it inside.' 'It just feels really good inside.' In the simple language of children, they will describe being both biologically and spiritually constructed to sense these innate attractions with the natural world (p 67)."

Some wilderness programs are created with a Native American theme that dictates their daily rituals, names of locations and even names they use to address each other. For example, Eckerd programs based on the east coast, work with public schools as an alternative option for adolescents. Their camps have Native American names and they address their counselors as "chief." They are not alone in their Native American approach to evening ceremonies that include sitting around a fire and speaking one at a time in an effort to share respect for talking time. Hunter and Sawyer (2006) speak to this very idea.

They claim that Native American spirituality teaches its children about mastery without competition, responsibility to themselves, others and nature, and independence to make decisions for themselves, holding themselves accountable to those consequences. Again, this ties back to the very goals wilderness therapy programs strive to teach their youth, and one may wonder how much credit of what wilderness therapy programs are built upon should be given to Native American spirituality influences. In addition, Hunter and Sawyer (2006) mention the importance of planting and tending to gardens and greenery in wilderness therapy campsites. This too is taken from a spiritual value that is taught to young Native Americans.

Summary

As mentioned, there is a lack of research about integrating spirituality and wilderness therapy. The literature indicates that people experience spiritual encounters with wilderness, and Pargament (2001) and others propose that spiritual interventions in traditional therapeutic settings can be affective. Therefore, adding a component of spiritual healing and growing into wilderness therapy programs may be beneficial. This may make the therapeutic process more holistic.

Unfortunately, no research exists on this theory. In light of the growing need to involve spirituality in traditional therapeutic settings, it is important to consider wilderness therapeutic settings as a category that would benefit from a spiritual expansion into their programs. The outdoor aspect of wilderness programs wilderness makes for an easy integration of spirituality. As already mentioned, spirituality may already be emerging on some level in the work done with youth in wilderness therapy programs. If this is true, it may benefit the youth in these programs for administrators to better

understand the circumstances and evaluate how program directors can capitalize on these experiences. If spiritual experiences are not organically present in the programs, as the lack of research available would suggest, then this makes this research question, "how can spirituality be a part of the wilderness therapeutic experience?" even more important for improving and building upon the current models of wilderness therapy.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research was to explore the presence of spirituality in wilderness therapy. In this exploratory study, the opinions of wilderness field staff of wilderness therapeutic programs were used to answer this research question. Can spirituality be a part of wilderness therapy? The focus of the interview questioning was based on how and when do these professionals see spirituality present in the lives of the youth at wilderness therapy programs, if at all. If they did see it, they were asked to elaborate and focus on any spiritual experiences tied to being in the outdoors. To expand on that idea, subjects were asked about their particular programs and about any spiritual component structured into the program. Subjects were then asked to reflect on the appropriateness of the relationship between their programs and spirituality and to evaluate whether it could be improved. In addition, subjects were asked to speak about their personal relationship with spirituality, if they identified with a spiritual perspective and what history they had with their identification. Information was also collected from the subjects about the specifics of the program they worked for and their opinions about the efficacy for the youth enrolled. Gender and age was also asked and documented.

The data was collected using a qualitative research process based on a flexible research design method. It was important to conduct qualitative data collection verses quantitative given the limited amount of information on this topic. This allowed the researcher to collect rich data that could formulate theory and questions for future studies

that examine this issue of integrating spirituality and wilderness therapy. This could also expand wilderness therapy research and spirituality in a way that would allow others to build on these findings with quantitative research. There is much information about spirituality and therapy, a modest amount on wilderness therapy, but none found so far directly addressing spirituality in the wilderness therapy setting. A self-created interview guide that outlines semi-structured, open-ended questions was used with participants in one-on-one interviews. Subjects answered nine open-ended questions, most containing two or three parts. The researcher also asked follow-up questions when she felt it was necessary to expand or elaborate on an issue in the conversation.

Sample

The participant pool consisted of 12 wilderness field staff from four different wilderness therapy programs in North Carolina. The sample size was intentional as it provided enough data to draw themes and results, but not so much that one runs into the dangers Anastas (1999) mentions, "one danger of larger samples under these [flexible methods studies] circumstances is that the investigator can become overwhelmed by data or too selective in the data actually used and reported on" (p. 292). Participants ranged in personal relationship to spirituality anywhere from associations to organized religion to no association to spirituality in current identification. All subjects were wilderness counselors, spoke English and were over the age of 18. Wilderness counselors have several titles depending on the specific program, but any person working in the field with the youth in a position that provides regular and consistent interactions with the youth will fall under the category of "wilderness counselor."

Having both spiritual and non-spiritual wilderness counselors was intentional because of the possibility of yielding richer data that show a variety of perspectives for the idea of spirituality being integrated into wilderness therapy programs. In addition, wilderness counselors were chosen as preferable to administrators because of their unique perspective on wilderness therapy programs. These counselors live with their students and see the day-to-day effects, successes and failures of the program. There was no limit or specification of a particular spirituality or non-spirituality of participants as the research was not designed to evaluate any specific religion. Other inclusion criteria were the age of participant, cultural or racial background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and ableism. As mentioned, the only exclusion criteria were people who are minors, do not speak English and do not currently work as a wilderness counselor.

A nonprobability sample technique was used. As Anastas (1999) recommends, it can make the most sense for flexible method research because of the need for rich data and smaller capacity for participant numbers. Specifically within this technique, the researcher used convenience sampling. The sample needed came from a specific population and were pulled from different therapeutic agencies within North Carolina. As Anastas (1999) points out, this can be limiting because of the potential for all participants coming from one agency. To prevent this, the researcher pulled from four different agencies. Some snowball sampling was utilized.

The 12 participants were interviewed either in person or on the phone during the months of December and January 2008. In the demographics section there was diversity across age, gender and represented program, but not cultural or racial background. The range in age was 24 to 64. The gender make up was 5 females and 7 males. Eleven of the

participants were Caucasian and one participant was an African American. Eleven of the 12 stated that they currently had a spiritual identity. All 12 subjects had a history of having spirituality or religion as a part of their lives at some point.

Selection Procedures

Willing participants were collected through a multistage sampling process. Being a former wilderness counselor, the researcher was able to contact informants at each wilderness therapy agency and work with them to set up time to recruit potential subjects. The logistics of recruitment within each agency depended on how the researcher could best work her way into their meetings and free time. The informant at each location was a personal contact of the researcher and worked from the administrative end of the program. These people were each given a consent form to fill out, giving permission for the researcher to recruit (See Appendix A). It emphasized the confidentiality of the agency's name or any distinguishing information about any student, if a student was mentioned in an interview. Each adminstrator was able to negotiate time for the researcher to speak with the staff.

During this time, the researcher spent about 10 minutes talking about her research interest, explaining why she was recruiting the audience she was addressing. She stated that this was work for her Masters in Social Work to further the research available regarding wilderness therapy. She informed them that their participation would help with the continual growth of wilderness therapy. She also highlighted that spiritual and non-spiritual participants were welcomed and encouraged to get a more balanced evaluation of spirituality in wilderness therapy. The researcher talked about what would be required of the participant and the confidentiality ensured. After the staff meetings, she meet with

anyone who had pending questions. The researcher told her audience how to get in

contact with her. She also distributed information cards, leaving extras with the agency.

In addition, at each location, the researcher posted flyers about her study with contact

information (See Appendix B).

Participants contacted the researcher primarily by email, an account set up

specifically for this project. A few utilized the telephone information given out.

Originally 18 people showed an interest in being in the study. All but one of the people

met the criteria to be participants. This one person was not currently a wilderness

counselor. Throughout the process of setting up in-person or phone appointments, the

participant pool weeded itself down to 12 participants because of scheduling conflicts and

participants loosing interest as time passed.

Ethics and Safeguards

Participants were all given a consent form approved by the Human Subjects

Review Board (HSR) of Smith College for Social Work (See Appendix C). The HSR

approval letter is also available in Appendix D. This consent form explained the

confidentially of the project and explained all of the procedures carried out to ensure this.

It also included that the participants could withdraw at any point in the study before April

2008 and that referrals to mental health specialists in the area were available upon

request.

The researcher took all possible precautions to protect the participants'

confidentiality and identity. She did not have their names attached to their interviews

materials. Audiotapes were coded with interview numbers. As these interviews were

coded and the data analyzed, it was continually represented by the interview code

numbers. Consent forms were kept separate from collected data. All of the data and consent forms will be kept in lock boxes for a minimum of three years in line with federal regulations. After this time period, the information will be destroyed unless is it still needed, in which case it will be destroyed after it is no longer needed. This information was included in the consent form.

While the researcher worked to ensure confidentiality with the above-mentioned measures, anonymity cannot be granted. This is because the researcher was present during the interviews and contacted the participants by phone and mail. The researcher was the only person who knew the link between data and personal participant information. The researcher transcribed the data, which cut down on the possibility of anyone besides herself having access to the data. When data was processed on the computer, it was saved onto a flash drive that was kept in the locked box. Any data on the computer was coded. The computer will also be password protected. This data will stay on a flash drive.

Data Collection

An effort was made to have all interviews conducted in person. Nine out of the 12 interviews were conducted in person. Participants were given the opportunity to pick a meeting place, date and time that was convenient and comfortable for them. Some of the participants wanted to meet during their free time where they worked. Some met in a local coffee shop, and others in their homes. For the interviews done over the phone, participants again chose a date and time convenient to them.

The structure of this data collection was based on an open-ended, semi-structured interview. This interview followed an interview outline (See Appendix D). The

researcher took the liberty to view the interview as a "special case conversation, an event in which two participants are to one extent or another mutually influencing the interaction and thus the data it will yield" (Anastas, 1999, p. 354). By this model, the researcher delved more into some questions with follow-up questions if it was relevant to what the participant was saying and reshaped other questions if they seemed irrelevant or redundant as the interview progressed. All the while, she was aware of the reality Anastas (1999) states about her actions constantly affecting the data given.

The researcher tried to weave in therapeutic relationship building skills before and during the interview to establish a trusting environment for participants with the goal of having participants feel comfortable in their level of sharing and honesty. Before the interview began, participants were first asked to go over and sign the consent form and ask any questions that came up for them in reviewing it. Next, the researcher set the structure for the interview by mentioning that the interview may take about an hour with about nine open-ended questions and some follow-up questions. She stated that the more information given when answering a question the better. She also encouraged them to let her know if any question makes the participant feel uncomfortable, and that he or she is not obligated to answer it. The researcher then began tape recording.

To begin the interview, participants were first asked to answer a few demographic questions (gender, cultural/racial background and age). Then they and the researcher spent anywhere from 20 minutes to one hour in a question and answer interview session. The interview began with questions about the participants' programs and their roles in their programs. Next, they were asked about the successfulness of these programs for the youth they work with and how having these programs based the outdoors was relevant to

the successfulness of the program. Then they were asked about their own relationships with spirituality, both historically and any currently. Finally, participants were asked to comment on a series of questions assessing spirituality in their programs (i.e. amount structured in program, appropriateness of this, criticisms, etc.) In every interview each participant answered every question. No participants reported feeling uncomfortable during the interviews.

Even though the researcher felt free to adapt her interview process, it was important that the researcher watch her biases in the interviewing process because she identified spiritually, and she worked in a similar agency and similar position as the subjects. The researcher's tone of voice and reactions to question was monitored because of noted biases.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was based on a three-part process recommended by Anastas (1999): data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. In the first stage the data had to be transformed from interview form. Interviews were digitally tape-recorded in a way that allowed the researcher to download interviews on the computer. She transcribed the interviews. During this transcription confidentiality was maintained in the process mentioned earlier. The transcriptions were examined thoroughly as the researcher began to pull out themes. These themes began the first stages of coding.

Inductive coding was used to code for different stages in order to pull themes from the transcriptions. As themes are formed, they were pulled into code units, most commonly phrases or paragraphs. The coding or labeling used was in vivo, meaning the codes are based on actual content of the participants' words. The coding processed

followed the five elements of good thematic code recommended by Anastas and taken

from Boyatzis (1998).

1. A label
2. A definition of what the theme contains
3. A description of what the theme contains
4. A description of how to know when the theme occurs
5. Examples, both positive and negative, to eliminate possible confusion when looking for the theme (p. 420)

This data was based on the manifest content and concrete data.

Grounded theory was used as the underlying guideline. This decision was based on the emphasis in grounded theory of constant comparison. It also incorporates the techniques of open coding and axial coding that line up with what was already mentioned for the researcher's coding techniques. In this way, the researcher was not locked into one hypothesized result, but allowed space for themes and trends to be revealed as the data was coded. That being said, Anastas (1999) also warns researchers to be cautious of validity and reliability being compromised as the researcher draws themes. She states that it is easy to discredit other emerging themes as original themes are solidifying. She also states the credibility increases as the link between data and meaning becomes more and more direct.

The purpose of drawing themes using these methods was to create useful meaning from wilderness counselors' thoughts about the appropriateness of spirituality and wilderness therapy. Conclusions were also drawn based on the specific structure of their agency, their personal convictions of spirituality and the different ways they see their program working to improve the lives of the youth. Other interesting themes touched on

their thoughts on how nature is a crucial variable for their work with youth identifing

when and if spirituality is present in this aspect of what they do.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the possible presence of

spirituality as part of wilderness therapy. In addition the researcher investigated the

appropriateness and intentionality of times when spirituality did emerge in the work.

Furthermore, the study investigated opinions of wilderness therapy counselors about the

potential benefits and harm of introducing spirituality into their work. The narratives of

therapeutic wilderness staff members revealed a variety of opinions and stories related to

their identification with their own spirituality, their evaluations of the wilderness therapy

and their experiences related to the presence or absence of spirituality in their work with

their students. The participants reported a variety of explanations for the success of

wilderness therapy and evidence of emerging spirituality. The richness of each subject's

own spiritual journey added another layer of complexity to the data. Upon analyzing the

data, it became evident that spirituality works as a function of wilderness therapy to allow

the students to develop introspection, to experience community engagement and to live

practices that promote wellness.

In order to elaborate, the findings are broken down into four themes. The first

theme will report participants' notions of their own spirituality to bring context to the

reports on the following three themes. This theme will also illustrate how the values

participants discuss about their own spirituality parallels values they attribute to

successful wilderness programs and values they attribute to spiritual growth for students.

The second theme will address how wilderness therapy is successful for students apart from the spiritual dimension. The third theme concerns how wilderness therapy fosters a spiritual growth process for students. Finally, the fourth theme addresses the risks and criticisms for spirituality in wilderness therapy programs. If the ideas shared by the participants about spirituality in their programs were to be critically evaluated for possible implementation, it would be important that the noted limitations and reservations for involving spirituality in wilderness therapy be explored and included as the last theme.

Within these themes it is important to illustrate how spiritual growth and wilderness therapeutic approaches work hand-in-hand to create positive change for students. The findings indicate that as wilderness therapy fosters spiritual growth for students, spiritual growth also allows for the positive change that creates therapeutic success for students.

Participants Notions of Their own Spirituality

Participants were asked to talk about their current spiritual identity, if any, and any history to their spiritual development. Everyone (100%) reported a history of growing up with Christianity at some point in their lives. Two of twelve (17%) of the participants had parents who were ministers, and one of the participants is a non-practicing ordained Christian minister. Currently two of the participants (17%) define themselves as Christian. Five of the participants (42%) define their spirituality as a personal spiritual journey that doesn't fit into a religious or spiritual title. For example one participant stated, "And it was for me, every time I learned about a new one [religion] and could open myself to that tradition, that I recognized that my family would

grow bigger and bigger and I was able to open my life to the world as opposed to just my beliefs." Two participants (17%) define themselves as agnostic. One participant defines himself as Catholic Monastic, one Zen Buddhist, and one aligns with Hinduism and mindfulness/mediation.

These participants also elaborated on what values they associated with their spiritual beliefs. These seem to break down easily into four categories: 1) connection to self, 2) connection to others, 3) religious/spiritual ceremonial practices and values, and 4) connection to nature. Three participants (25%) stated that their spirituality was an individual endeavor to know themselves better and hold themselves accountable. As one put it, "for me spirituality is being just like, trying to overcome my own personal issues in my life due to my own will… trying to make myself a better person, you know, emotionally secure and more emotionally open to the world."

Eight (67%) of the participants made reference to the importance of connection to others. Four of these eight emphasized contributing to the well being of others as an important component of their spirituality. Three of the eight named the belief that acceptance of all and the understanding that everyone is a part of a greater oneness. For example, one said,

> The truth is that we're all really one. One connected spirit. And that God is not outside of us. Well God is outside of us, but inside of us too. It's really that everything is connected and that individual self is an illusion that dissolves into a great field of energy or however you want to put that – timelessness, unchanging consciousness awareness.

One participant responded that the essence to her spirituality is a supportive community.

Five of the participants (42%) mentioned spiritual or religious practices. Two of these five noted that they attended a church and three revealed that they pray or meditate.

In addition, five (42%) participants specifically included that morals were important to the make up of their spiritually. Two of the five alluded to a general adherence to the moral conduct of their spirituality. As one said, "As I am a father and husband, now begins the new quest of how do I instill those beliefs that my father and mother instilled in me as far as what religion does for you, or spirituality, as far as core values; how you treat people, how you treat yourself. I think it's just a code of conduct, for lack of better words, on how you should live." Two of the five specifically referenced a moral belief in the goodness of others and one believed in the principle, by doing good, good will come to you.

Finally, four of the participants (34%) referenced connection to nature as fundamental to their spirituality and two of the four specifically sited moving to western NC, in close proximity to the mountains and outdoor activities,

> When I was through hiking the Appalachian Trail, it was a very spiritual time for me. Nature brings it out more for me and that's one of the reasons I wanted to move out here [western NC] because this place, western NC, these mountains, just have a magnet for me. And what I always found is if I came here, at least for a week during the year, I would have, or feel like I had a good year. I've never had a bad year, but kind of disconnected, there was a disconnect.

Three of the four also elaborated how actually being outdoors brings them closer to their spirituality. For example,   "I could be hiking and the clouds will clear and you can see this amazing, amazing view. And it's like, that was awesome. You can see that, and appreciate that there's probably something behind that other than, 'that's a pretty mountain.' "

Wilderness Therapy is Successful for Students

The successes reported in this section are broken down into the subthemes connection to self, connection to others and connection to nature. These subthemes encompass what participants name as most important to create therapeutic success for students. As these subthemes play out, it is interesting to note that these successes also parallel subthemes of the spiritual growth section. This observations support the over arching theme that spirituality is a function for successful wilderness experiences. Also, the data reported regarding participants' own spiritual values seem to inform what participants acknowledge as components for successful wilderness therapy for students.

Everyone (100%) of the participants stated that wilderness therapy was successful for their students. For example, one wilderness counselor said, "Oh, yes, I feel really good about the work we do with the boys and really believe in the program." Participants reported students' ability to connect to self, ability to connect to others, students' relationships with staff and students' interaction with nature as essential for success in wilderness therapy programs. To reiterate, these factors are also the essence of what participants report as indicators of spiritual growth for students. This data was based on interview questions inquiring about the specific program participants worked for, their roles at these programs, if/ how they thought these programs were successful and if/how nature played a role in this success.

Students' connection to self

Connection to self encompasses students' motivation for change, students' self-discovery and students' responsibility to take care of themselves. Four of the participants (33%) stated that students must first want to change for the program to be successful for

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them, "But the students' success, it may take them a few weeks to get a realization to know that no mom and dad aren't coming to get you…I've got to work on the boundaries that are set. But once they get to that point, there's a lot more potential for major transformation." These participants saw students who did not progress much because they didn't want to be there and then those students who made tremendous changes when they chose to. In addition, motivation was key to this process as two participants (17%) reported that the wilderness therapy programs are based on self-motivation and "challenge by choice."

Once students have decided to engage in the program, many participants reported that self-discovery was essential to any growth or change in the program. Eight of the participants (67%) reported that during the course of the students' stay they see these students coming to realizations about themselves that benchmark progress,

> Usually it's not like, oh I'm going to leave here and be the teacher's pet model. It's more like, planting seeds. A lot of them have realizations, 'I'm not like the rest of the people, how and I going to be viewed outside of this place?' also things like, students tell others about their capability to be self-reliant. A lot of students are like victims and they see victimizing situations. And those students by the end of it will say, 'I can do this, so can you.' For example with hiking, a lot of students have trouble hiking, but by the end of the program…they realize it's just their mind that keeps telling them things and like, their body could do it.

Three participants (25%) reported that the program itself is designed to have a self-reflection component that creates self-discovery. As one counselor said, "It's more based on intrinsic development of intrinsic motivation and learning about yourself." Four of the participants (33%) noted that part of their job was helping students work through their issues in a self-discovery process.

Most notable were participants' reports of students' self-discovery when implementing parts of the program that immersed the students in nature. Five participants (42%) stated that when distractions were eliminated from the lives the students led previous to the program, students where able to get in touch with themselves,

> Just so much is going on all the time that a lot of kids make it to early teenage years without really having any sense of their imagination or their own capabilities. And things were so fast for them, it lets them slow down and take a real look in the mirror, it seems like, without all the make up on. Or all the pressures you know, they may have gotten into a crowd or to a routine at home that they know is not helpful, but now it's hard for young adults to kind of step back sometimes and really honestly say what they need to do, what they know they need to do. You kind of take them out of that environment and put them in something completely novel and something that's completely at the core of being a human being…[and] it puts everything in a more simple language so that they can sort out what's really going on instead of having all this external stimulus making them bounce off the walls.

These reports indicated that even though an organic process seemed to be happening for the students' self-discovery process, it was in fact an intentional part of the program, "…so they project themselves on their instructors and their staff and the woods, and the trees, and the rain, and what you get is the kids get to see themselves and how those projections are keeping them stuck and trapped. And all we have to do is watch and point out, did you notice…" Other intentional interventions included the importance of the solo expedition that one participant reported as the time when they are left alone in the woods for three days to reflect. Three of the participants (25%) also mentioned journaling as a way to self-reflect.

The participants also report that in addition to these students being able to self-reflect they are also discovering new strengths in themselves because of these outdoor

activities. Three participants (25%) reported that students were able to feel successful and

increase their understanding of their perceived limitations,

> You meet something that's really, really challenging that you don't think you can
> do. But in the end you can learn the hard skills to do it. And that's where the
> learning comes in. It's developing the hard skills and learning that you can do it.
> And then you get into the soft skills of, 'how did you do it then?' Climbing is the
> greatest therapy thing in the world, rock climbing… The metaphor is phenomenal.
> 'I can't do this.' 'This is impossible.' 'I'm scared.' I mean that's life…. But over
> time, the kids eventually get better. And before long they're, they're at the top of
> the cliff. It doesn't mean they're not scared anymore, but it means that they can do
> it. They've overcome their fear.

The final noted component to connection to self by participants was students'

awareness of the need to take care of themselves. Five participants (42%) reported

changes noted in the progress of the students based on their ability to take responsibility

for themselves. "I see them [students] kind of just learning to take responsibility for their

actions instead of blaming it on other people. Realizing that life, like their lives;

everything that they do effects them internally and externally and that they are in charge

of their lives and not their parents. But that they affect everybody around them, not just

themselves." Within these five, three specifically noted that the students increased pride

in self. As one participant said, "Then after, you know, however long it takes…they're

upright. Their spine is vertical. You know, they're making eye contact with the audience

or whomever they're talking to. Their shirts are tucked in." In addition, one participant

reported that it was part of her job to help hold students responsible for themselves.

Building on that participant's report of her own role in facilitating, five

participants (42%) reported that self-responsibility and self-care are intentionally

implemented in the program using nature as catalyst. "I mean there's all kinds of things

like natural consequences, like you know, students don't take care of their stuff, it's going

to fall apart, it's going to break, it's going to get wet, ruined. They directly see the way that their behaviors influence their lives. A lot of them don't really have that cause and effect between my behavior and outcome…. A lot will have the realization that 'Hey I do control my life.'"

Students' Connection to Others

Connection to self is only one building block that participants reported as crucial to a successful experience for students. Participants also report students' ability to work with other students, connect with their wilderness counselors and build communication skills with parents that will ease their transition home. Four participants (33%) reported that students become better at relationships with other students in their time in wilderness therapy. One participant elaborated on how this is helpful to their growth through the program,

> So all the patterns that they have with people show up in the woods. If they are pleasers, they want to jump hoops so people will like them. We can see it. If they like to intimidate everybody because they are scared to death, we can see it. So it's almost like a psychodrama. I mean it's real because these are real relationships that these kids are developing... it's a microcosm to their world and we just sit back and watch and eventually help the kids understand how they are doing this to themselves.

This happens primarily through the group process that is structured in all of the programs where the participants work. In addition to the group process, participants again report on the ways that being in nature creates opportunities for communication with peers and teamwork skills. Two of the participants (17%) reported that students' teamwork skills are crucial to surviving in the woods together,

> Let's say we're backpacking and one student's not kind of doing so well. They can either one, make fun of the kid or two, help the kid. And realize, 'hey when I make fun of him, he's not going to go anymore, he's just going to completely stop

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hiking. Oh, when I help him, he's going to go faster, we get to lunch quicker, we get to go home quicker, we get to play a little more, and we get done quicker and it's not dark when it's time to set up camp.' And they see, 'if I actually help this kid, or we help each other out,' they can gain things from that, other than just making fun or being mean.

Participants also noted that much of the successes mentioned so far are in part possible because of the relationships formed between wilderness counselors and students. All of the participants (100%) interviewed reported that they have interactions with the students on a daily basis. Nine of the participants (75%) work in shifts for days a time, living with the students. Four of the participants (33%) stated that talking to the students about the student's issues was a part of their work. One participant reported his role in the group process. An additional two participants (17%) who don't have as much contact with students mentioned that they go out of their ways to spend time with the students because they enjoy the interactions so much. Two participants (17%) reported that being a positive role model was important to the work they did. "One of the jobs in my opinion, of the instructor is to provide a positive social atmosphere where we have respect for others and others respect themselves. Things like that are modeled and created so that students are influenced by that." Five of the participants (42%) noted that having a positive relationship with the students made the experience of the student more successful. They reported that a trusting relationship allowed the student a safe place to grow and take risks. "I think your success with students is all about your relationship with the student and the rapport you have with that kid. A kid has to trust you and he has to feel that you're invested in his best interest."

Finally, wilderness therapy programs are successful for students because they teach communication skills that are helpful for their return to their parents. Four

participants (33%) reported that the students' communication skills improve while in the wilderness therapy program. They stated that they are able to articulate their feelings, process with their peers and communicate with authority figures in ways they were unable to initially. In addition, two participants (17%) discussed the importance of preparing the students for home, which includes skill building to handle family dynamic situations. One stated, "Some of the parents say we really have to get used to my son. If we wanted to talk, he would put his fingers in [the process for speaking during group process] and it was so appropriate and he was able to articulate his feelings and it was very different before he came to [the program]. He was frustrated, getting really angry and the group process really worked at home."

Students' Connection to Nature

As mentioned in previous sections, nature can be a catalyst for connection to self and others. In fact, eight participants (68%) stated that nature was crucial to the success of the students they work with. "I think that almost every aspect of the fact that [the therapeutic program is] in the wilderness is immensely valuable and I guess the kernel of why I believe in wilderness programs." In addition, participants reported that nature serves to open new avenues for students. Four participants (33%) reported that the exposure to nature served to introduce different lifestyles for the students. This included a new passion for environmental conservation, a change in career ambitions and change in extracurricular activities, "I think the woods can be a real safe space for boys to be boys." As this process of introduction to the wilderness is happening, some participants noticed that over time students will also develop an appreciation of the beauty of nature. Six

(50%) reported seeing students become inspired and taken aback by their natural

surroundings.

> They know beauty when they see it. It was amazing this summer. We were on top
> of T Mountain…. And we were sitting there, and it was a beautiful day. And one
> of these kids, and these are you know gangsters, and he's like, this is such a
> beautiful place. I don't think I've ever been in such a beautiful place in my life.

These reported moments in the students' experiences built on even more

awareness of the materialist world they came from according to some participants. Three

participants (25%) reported that being in the woods is an opportunity for students to

appreciate the materialistic items they left at home and have a new found appreciation for

the materials they were privy to. One example mentioned students who criticized the vans

they were traveling on, and at the end of their weekend in the woods they were very

appreciative of the same van that would transport them out of the woods.

These wilderness programs also all involve "hard skills" development based on

survival skills in the woods. Four participants (33%) stated this development is crucial for

progress in the program. They reported that it contributed to self-esteem improvement.

The students feel a tangible success that they can hold on to, reported one participant, in a

way that can feel like a high that replaces the unnatural high they've been drawn to in the

past.

The mentioned reports of connection to nature all stem from the questions about

what makes the wilderness experience meaningful and successful for students; therefore,

participants indicate that having a connection to nature can make a lasting positive

impression on students.

Wilderness Therapy Fosters Spiritual Growth for Students

During this process of successful experiences for students through the channels mentioned earlier, students also seem to have a significant opportunity for spiritual growth, according to participants. In fact, these spiritual growth opportunities and successful therapeutic experiences seem to go hand in hand and actually create opportunities for one another. This will become clear as this section unfolds and the reader sees that many of the themes found in spiritual growth were also found in the wilderness therapeutic successes section. These findings also parallel some of the reports participants made in regard to their own values in spirituality. Again these wilderness counselors own values of being in relationship, finding spirituality in nature, and participating in ceremonies or rituals seem to inform how they see spiritual growth happening for their students.

Participants' reports were based on questions about the current spiritual practices in the programs and if/how students grew spiritually because of these available avenues. In addition, they were asked to report any spiritual experiences they noticed the students having naturally during the process of being in wilderness therapy. Finally, they were asked to evaluate their programs' spiritual structures including what was done well, how/if they would change anything and why needed change didn't happen. Ten participants (83%) reported seeing some spiritual experience happen for students in the time they've work at their programs.

Interestingly, nine participants (75%) that initially reported that their programs had no spiritual components, all changed their minds as they began to elaborate on their answers and talk about different component of their programs. They were operating from

the program language that did not name spirituality as a part of their program. As the interview questions became more in depth, though, they began to acknowledge their ritualistic ceremonies, quiet medication times and reflection times as spiritual. In addition, as they began to talk, they would remember times they witnessed students having spiritual experiences and would name those. It seems that these participants own understanding of spirituality began to evolve as they talked it out, and they would incorporate more and more into their definition of spiritual experiences at wilderness therapy programs. Three participants (33%) stated from the beginning that there were spiritual components to their programs.

There were several components that participants reported contributed to spiritual growth that can be divided into subthemes. These were the programs' ceremonies and rituals, religious and or spiritual education, relationships with staff members, students' connections to nature, and reports of the innate spiritual process that cannot be attributed to a catalyst. As these sub themes are elaborated below, the ideas of student introspection, community engagement and lived practices that promote wellness emerge and illustrate this major theme that spiritual growth is a function of wilderness therapy and success for students.

Ceremonies and Rituals

The importance of ceremonies and rituals was mentioned briefly as a value for participants in their own spiritual journeys, but the bulk of the reports of ceremonies and rituals lie in this section. Nine participants (75%) reported that ceremonies and rituals are a part of their programs and two (17%) mentioned that more spiritual activities should be incorporated. These practices currently present include quiet time before meals,

meditation, journaling, sweat lodges, smudgings, labyrinths, yoga, solo expeditions and

mental focusing exercises. It is reported that these practices seem to encourage self-

reflection and connection to self. One participant acknowledged the importance of the

solo expeditions. She stated that this is an opportunity for the students to really sit with

themselves. They have reflection questions to answer, and it is part of their time to see

what they have accomplished at the program before they return home. In addition,

another two participants specifically noted the importance of journaling. They reported

that the students can be given topics to journal about that encourage self-discovery. These

practices commonly also signify a transition a student has made in the program, a

progression toward graduation.

> It's sort of like a commitment type of ceremony. We'd have a big fire on the
> peninsula and maybe we'll have each of them [students] waiting for their turn.
> And they walk in silence along this darkened path…and they sit silently. They all
> come up in a circle. Some words are spoken. Sometimes there'll be somebody
> playing, like a staff playing the drums or the guitar in the background…. Or we
> might all bring a stick, and 'look how together you can't break the stick, but apart
> each is one and you can snap it in two. But then your spirit, you know, your soul
> and your spirit and all that you have to offer can make camp a strong place for
> everyone and for the group…'

 Specifically five participants (42%) attributed these practices to Native American

culture. These cultural practices were borrowed in hopes of adding more meaning to

program ceremonies and emphasized the use of drums, fire, sage and rituals like sweat

lodges and labyrinths. Three participants (25%) also emphasized the use of meditation

and prayer as a core part of the students' spiritual growth. "We had one student who

would go, you know when it was really cold outside, in his boxers and sit cross legged

for twenty or thirty minutes and he was working with his Indian, Eastern religion. You

know that's one of the things the monks do." All three programs that participants were a

part of have a quiet or meditative time before meals, and one program also has a "serenity prayer" in the mornings. These times can be used for religious or spiritual practices, but are also open for students to reflect about their days. All that is required is that they remain silent. One participant reported that at their meditative time, students take turns leading it. The student, at his turn, can pick something to read. Some students will choose to say a prayer.

In addition, two participants (17%) stated that their programs' practices had more of a magical theme than spiritual, but described the magical ideas as a kind of spirituality. This seemed to be more focused on a hero's journey that included phases where the student would work on self-development and "conquering their own dragons" in a way that mimics stories like Harry Potter, Sidhartha and Lord of the Rings.

Participants also stated that many students have their own rituals and ceremonies that they mostly brought from home even though some students were exposed to them at their programs. Two participants (17%) reported that they are more likely to see spiritual practices emerge if the students were already spiritual. Five participants (42%) reported that the program seems to reignite spiritual and religious practices. One participant reported,

> Sometimes the kids that were religious would say, 'wow I'm feeling really connected out here. Can I get a Bible, or can I get a Torah, or can I get a meditation book about this or that?' So sometimes they're naturally, their religions that they learned growing up start to kick back in for some objectives. Like 'I haven't been to church in a while, but I'm starting to think about God a lot.'

It seems that this experience for students recreates healthy habits that students may continue to practice after leaving. Four participants (33%) reported seeing students participate in the specific rituals of reading religious text and signing the cross across

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their bodies. Two participants (17%) reported seeing their students form an interest in the Eastern religious practices.

Aside from the presence or absence of spiritual practices within the program, honoring the students' own religious and spiritual needs was mentioned by seven participants (58%) as an important part of what their programs do. This is yet another way that wilderness therapy programs are creating opportunities for introspection and healthy practices. Two participants (17%) also evaluated that their programs needed more availability for students to worship spiritually. One participant mentioned an Easter service field trip that was available for students to attend. Participants stated that students were allowed to have spiritual books upon request. They also mentioned that accommodations would be made to honor religious days and worship needs if possible, especially if this was the parents' wishes. One participant reported that the desire to meet students' needs was there, but also caused complications.

> I have a student coming into my program and his mother is very Christian and wants her son to be Christian and called to ask about our religion education and formation. You can send books, and I want these kids to be able to read anything they want to then if their parents want them to; if they're willing to do it. But, I'm not sure how we're going to do it. What I'm thinking is, is it ok to get a chaplin to come down once a month to talk to this boy? That might be one way to do. But, you know does that mean that all the other kids are going to want church services, and if that is the case, how do we do that? It certainly wouldn't be a bad thing, but I don't want to be exclusive with that.

Finally, it should be mentioned that one participant speculated that spiritual rituals could be a way for students to replace negative cultural rituals, such as drug use. She stated that in her work with students, that the rituals around the drug culture seemed to be craved because of an absence of any other cultural rituals. Her example also highlights

how encouraging positive rituals and ceremonies is a spiritual function of wilderness therapy.

Religious and Spiritual Education

Education and exposure were important when participants were asked to evaluate spirituality in their programs and implies that these participants realize that the opportunity to grow spiritually is an important process for the wilderness therapy experience. Eight participants (68%) stated that their programs should have an educational and/or exposure process to different religions and spiritualities.

> I think that it's huge that they would be able to see that [spiritual education] and be able to explore that and take part and just kind of inquire. Maybe it's not [for them] but at least they've inquired and they've tried and they're educated, because if they're not educated about their spirituality, then when are they ever going to have that opportunity? … if not then they're just going to be assuming about those different faiths.

These ideas for exposure and education included field trips to different spiritual experiences or requirements in the program for students to research different spiritualities. Bringing spiritual speakers in to educate students was suggested to "discuss on a very human level how these things help through their [students] lives, how these things add meaning and benefit." This is another tool for connection to self and growth.

It was also mentioned that there should be open spaces where students are encouraged to talk about spirituality with one another. In this case, the participant cited a time when he was working with a student from the Islamic tradition and how rewarding it would have been for him to share his faith with others in a safe space. One participant noted that her program was already introducing religious or spiritual exploration into their structure by requiring their students to research spiritualities and report on them.

Another participant clarified that he would recommend that spiritual education be labeled as 'exposure to values and connection' instead of giving it any tie to spirituality or religion because it would be more welcoming for students and more likely to be accepted by administrators and staff.

Three participants (25%) also highlighted, aside from incorporating spirituality and religious education for the purpose of students adopting these practices, that spiritual growth also happens as the program educates students about certain values that are associated with these spiritualities and religions. Mentioned values included sacrifice, discipline, service and hard work. One of these participants reported that he thinks "it's in a way ignorant to completely eliminate spirituality because that's usually the ethical course behind people's actions."

Relationships with Staff

As participants exhibit their concern for spiritual exposure in their programs, it is not surprising that they value their own as well as their co-workers' contributions to the process. Relationship with staff was also named as an important component for success for students in the previous section, wilderness therapeutic successes, and emerges again when exploring spiritual growth for students. Seven participants (58%) reported that the spiritual growth that happens for their students is in part through the relationship with their staff. Staff members' leadership in spiritual growth also serves as a way to teach the students by example about community engagement as they model their interactions with one another. Their reports range from opening avenues for students to have conversations with staff if students are interested, to providing a discussion group about spiritual values, to staff taking liberties to share their own beliefs even if the program does not

recommend it. In one report, the participant shared that he believes parents are more

reassured to send their kids to the program he works for because of his spiritual

affiliation. He further reported that he runs a discussion group based on students' musical

choices and encourages them to investigate whether they are getting their spiritual needs

met through their choice of music. He added that the students appreciate that he is not

there to turn them away from the music. He is able to engage them in a spiritual

conversation that promotes group communication and respect in a way that is appealing

for his students. In all of these reports, it seems most important that there is a balance

between exposures of the staff's beliefs and openness to encourage where the student

wants to go with his spirituality.

> I've encountered many [students] having spiritual crises, along with personal
> crises on their everyday life, also identity crises. I don't think it would be
> appropriate to indoctrinate them with any personal views of my own or personal
> use of the company. But to inspire them to discuss their doubts, their fears and
> also their convictions would be beneficial in that they are starting to understand
> who they are.

In addition to these seven reports, three participants (25%) noted that staff

openness to spirituality was an asset to connecting to students' spirituality. Again, by

leading by example of their own spiritual journeys, staff encourages students to explore

themselves more fully. These participants reported that their knowledge of different

spiritualities and religion and their understanding of their own spirituality contributed to

spiritual experiences with their students. One participant stated that he was able to use his

understanding and background with Christianity to convince a Christian student not to act

on his suicidal threats. This participant knew that the student held to the values of

Christianity and that suicide was a sin in his understanding of the religion. One

participant also reported that staff who can model spiritual values are important for students' spiritual growth.

Ironically, five (42%) participants stated that they were explicitly told not to discuss their spiritual or religious beliefs with students in spite of all the reports to the contrary. These reports represented all three wilderness programs the participants are a part of They elaborated that from an administrative position it was not part of their program to incorporate spirituality in to their job role. In addition, two participants (17%) reported that their programs had a history of staff members pushing their religions onto the students. These staff members were said to be extreme in their beliefs and offended parents and students. This puts the programs in a liable position and a position to loose business. As a result, participants reported that their programs have had to be more straightforward in their policies to not force religion onto students. That being said, four participants (33%) also mentioned that these regulations are not tightly monitored and as long as there is a healthy balance in discussion with students about spirituality and the discussion is student initiated, then there isn't usually a problem.

Connection to Nature

Connection to nature, even though not a major theme in itself, threads it way through each major theme. In this theme, spiritual growth of students, participants discuss how the students' experience of nature is another avenue for spiritual growth. Connection to nature also includes opportunities for student introspection, community engagement and wellness practices. Seven participants (75%) referenced nature as a catalyst for the students' connection to spirituality. These specific parts of nature included the feeling one gets from hiking a mountain, the awe of white water rafting and even the connection one

makes to a stick "to him that stick is important, he cares about that stick… he has a connection with that, that has some value. If something happens to that stick, he's going to experience sadness." Participants were able to quote students' reactions to spiritual experiences in nature. One participant quotes,

'I've never found God any where before, but I think I might have found God here.' 'There must be a God, this is so beautiful.' And, 'I think I found God here.'

Another participant recounts when students are hiking and just start talking about going back to church because that was a time when they were happy. Here nature seems to be prompting them to remember other positive life practices that gave them a similar feeling to what they are feeling by being in nature.

Connection to self was mentioned explicitly by two of these seven participants. One participant attributes this connection to nature to the realization of sense of self that students get and that spirituality is a part of that self they discover or re-discover. Another participant also contributes that part of the self-discovery part of their program encourages spiritual growth. He reported. "[Spirituality in nature] has been very rewarding to the boys and they have acknowledged it and they talk about…how some of them are living their lives now by spending so much time out in the forest by themselves without staff instructing it. And they just feel so refreshed. All of this is put in the spirit here because it is something you can do to help yourself to grow within. I think the program in that way really speaks to them." These conversations happen within the group context and create space to talk about emotions and experiences in a communication style that is new for most students.

Additionally, two participants (17%) specifically report that because their spiritualities are so connected to nature, they can't imagine students not being touched spiritually by being outdoors. They both go on to elaborate about times when they saw their students make these same connections for the first time. As these connections are happening in outdoor experiences, they also are happening in a community setting. These students then have the chance to bond with one another during this shared experience. One participant spoke about the group processing after rewarding outdoor experiences and noted the connections happening among students.

Spiritual Process Cannot be Separated

It is worth mentioning that four participants' (33%) reports indicated that they could not distinguish what explicitly fosters spiritual growth for the students because it is an innate part of the process. One participant acknowledged that the energy present between staff members, students and the land makes the program spiritual. Another participant stated that it would be contradictory to implement structured spiritual time because it emerges as a part of the students' experiences. For example, when they are "fuming, and they are going to hear the creek and going to hear the birds…and it just settles people quicker than it would in other places." She went on to say that by doing spiritual activities, time is not left for reflection when spirituality would naturally emerge. A third participant agreed by saying that,

> The context [wilderness therapy] is spiritual, to me, nature and spirituality are inner related, the very context is spiritual. Your tea bag and your tea cup, after a while it's all tea. Then if you're steeped in it, you're getting it. Then, if the environment is spiritual because it's natural and if we recognize and honor and bring it in, then that's kind of happening all the time already. You can't separate it.

And finally, one participant mentioned that a higher power was always present guiding what happens and making sure the process was as it was supposed to be.

Criticisms of Involving Spirituality in Wilderness Therapy.

The reports about spiritual growth in wilderness therapy were bountiful. It is equally important, however to ask participants about their criticisms and reservations for implementing structured spiritual components into the programs where they work. These reports acknowledged both programmatic and logistical concerns as well as concerns they had for how this process could negatively effect the students. Their concerns can be categorized into three sub themes, conflict with their program goals for successful students, reservations of parents and possible negative side effects for students.

Conflict with Program Goals

Six participants (50%) reported that it would be logistically difficult for programs to incorporate spirituality more directly into programs. Within this group, two participants worried that it would take away from the priority of teaching concrete skills for their students to be successful in society. In addition, the idea of these programs is based on group work, and two participants reported that spirituality is an individual journey and would take the focus off of the group process. Another participant also explained that their program is designed with a consequences and actions structure where everything is concrete and consistent. He stated, "It [the program] should be less mind, body connection and spirituality, and more about this is reality of life. Go in the A tunnel and you get what's at the end of the A tunnel." Another participant questioned the reality of a program being open for students to seek all traditions and even further, how would

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staff be trained to facilitate this? And finally, one participant reported that the time period students are in the programs is too short to adequately address these spiritual needs.

Three participants (25%) reported that it is ethically wrong because of the principle of separation of church and state. Even though two of participants worked in private programs, they indicated that it was ethically wrong to have students in a mandated program and incorporate spirituality.

Even if participants wanted to change the set up of their programs, six participants (50%) reported that it was in the hands of corporate administration. They stated that these administrations did not want to change the program for various reasons and that the participants were limited in what they could do to change programs because of this influence. Two of these participants noted that corporate only approved unspecific growth (self-discovery, etc) and would not endorse specific spiritual growth. One participant mentioned that programs had been running a certain way for many years, and it would be hard to convince them to change what was already in place.

Not Appealing for Parents

Another important reason administrators are hesitant to incorporate more spirituality is because they fear business would be bad, according to four participants (33%). As mentioned earlier, some participants reported that having a program with spiritual components would be appealing for parents. There were also participants who reported the opposite. When asked about more spiritual integration, one participant said, "I think that you'd have a lot of scared parents." Another added, "places that tend to call themselves, you know, that have a spiritual component, are thought of as being a religious school and I think that really limits their [program's] marketability." One

participant reported that it's hard to sell even the idea of therapy to many parents, and spirituality would be even more "out there" for them. One participant, in addition to the 33%, introduced the possibility of programs being sued because parents felt the program forced spirituality or religion on to them.

Finally, one participant reported that incorporating spirituality can be a risk for family therapy. All of these programs encourage parent involvement when possible, and this participant stated that if the program encourages a spirituality that the family does not align with, then that can be counterproductive to the family therapy work.

Negative Side Effects for Students

There were concerns that the participants had for the students in particular. Three participants (25%) reported that students are not developmentally mature enough to think on the abstract level needed to for spiritual growth. They feared then that this process would distract them from their focus to move though the stages of the program. An additional two participants (17%) believed that this could also create a loop hole for students to manipulate the structures in place. One participant illustrated,

> What we're really trying to teach them with wilderness is that you are responsible for yourself because there are these natural consequences. They could use the spiritual piece to say, 'well it's just fate' or 'this isn't my destiny' or you know, 'I've got a devil inside' or 'I'm powerless,' and what we're trying to do is empower them and show them that they are in control of their lives and there aren't these outside forces that are in control of their lives.

Two participants (17%) worried that focusing too much on spirituality would create conflict between students as they expose their beliefs to their peers. Additionally, this process could alienate some students who practiced non-dominate religions or spiritualities. One of the two participants reported that he already sees the alienation

process happen with his students without any spiritually structured activities. He also

goes on to mention his fears that it could cause a hierarchical system and power

struggles.

As instrumental as staff can be in the success of the students, four participants

(33%) worry about the influence staff can have over a student's spiritual journey. They

worry that students may admire their staff members and that it would be easy for staff to

be too spiritually influential. She stated,

> It can become a kid who's really looking to cling to something and you take away
> all the things that he clung to in the past and his security blankets, essentially, and
> you put him in this environment and he's got nothing…it [spiritually of staff]
> could be something that he really clings to.

One participant reported that any spiritual intervention by staff is inappropriate and that

staff should be hands off.

Summary

These four themes, participants' spiritualities, successes in wilderness therapy,

spiritual growth for students and criticisms and limitations unfold to suggest that spiritual

experiences and opportunities can serve a function in the success of wilderness therapy

and may also be harmful to the therapeutic process. Some positive possibilities include,

students ability to learn a deeper understanding of themselves, communicate and connect

with others in unique and different wayas and learn healthy habits that they can hold on

to after graduating the programs. On the other hand, is spiritual integration could also be

a distraction from the necessary work needed in a behavioral, concrete model. It also runs

the risk of over influencing students in vulnerable positions and could cause parents to

loose interest in sending their children to a place that will involve spiritual education and exposure.

As this data analysis process unfolds, an interesting dynamic evolves. As spiritual growth in the way of introspection, community engagement and wellness practices create successful students, it seems the wilderness therapeutic structures can simultaneously create opportunities for spiritual growth. These two processes seem to feed off each other in a way that is beneficial for the students. The wilderness therapeutic structures set up ceremonies, rituals, requirements and exposure to nature in ways that allow students the space to grow spiritually whether it is the intent of the program or not. The limitations and criticisms present logistical, ethical, practical and marketable challenges taht caution jumping too quickly into the ideas and observations of most of the participants. They expose the reader to the realities of why spirituality is not more present. Spirituality is an abstract and emotional concept. It may be irresponsible to assume all students are ready for this journey, or would even want this journey. Because many participants align strongly with a spirituality, it is easy to be swayed by their reports into believing spiritual exposure and education is a helpful and needed component. Many participants reported that their spiritual journey was one of their choices and at their own paces. It is important to remember this point. These participants also explain why balance and intentionality is important because of the participants' concern for their students. The reports of the participants are enlightening and fascinating and their implications will be explored further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was based on the question, how can spirituality be a part of the wilderness therapeutic experience? It built on the assumption that it was possible to find spirituality in wilderness therapy but questioned whether field staff members of wilderness therapy programs saw spirituality as part of the work they did. An important distinction emerged in the interviews between whether spirituality found in the programs was intentionally structured into the programs or whether participants found that it emerged naturally. If it did emerge naturally, how did spirituality manifest in the opinions of the participants and what was it about wilderness therapeutic programs that created an environment that invited spiritual experiences? If it was structured in the programs, how was it done and was it appropriate?

The data yielded interesting findings. The overarching theme discovered was the notion that spirituality is a function of wilderness therapy that allowed the students to develop introspection, community engagement and lived practices that promote wellness. This was emphasized by the theme that stated wilderness therapy is successful because of its model that stresses connection to self, others and new life habits. Spirituality was reported to have emerged in wilderness therapy This theme indicated that spiritual practices in these programs, whether intentional or not, promote the same criteria of connection to self, others and nature just as does wilderness therapy. Spirituality adds to what was essential for a successful wilderness therapeutic experience. Interestingly, the

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participants all had some personal experiences with spirituality. Their reports about the

meaningfulness of spirituality in their lives seemed to parallel their reports of successful

wilderness therapy components and spiritual experiences of the students.

<center>*Comparisons of Literature Review to Findings*</center>

After completing the data analysis it was interesting to discover findings that

supported what was also reported in the literature. The findings support sections in the

literature review on wilderness therapy, spirituality and therapy, spirituality and

wilderness and spirituality as a part of wilderness therapy.

Wilderness Therapy

In the literature, Russell and Phillips-Miller (2002) indicated that the basic

components of wilderness therapy, exercise, primitive camping, peer relationship

building and group building, plus the relationship formed with therapeutic field staff all

contributed significantly as positive-change elements for the enrolled youth. Several

times in the findings participants emphasized the importance of peer relationship building

and group building in the way of connection to others. The participants reported that

connection to others created opportunities for skill building through communication and

teamwork. One participant also reported that group living gave students an opportunity to

work through their issues as situations arose in their interactions with students that would

remind them of similar problem areas from home. Connection to others in these

wilderness programs was also mentioned by participants as important for spiritual

growth. Many of the ceremonies and rituals were done in a group setting.

In addition to Russell and Phillips-Miller, many researchers agree that the

relationship between wilderness counselors and youth is crucial to success for these

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young people (Williams, 2002; Lyman, et al, 1989; Fletcher and Hinkle, 2002). The research elaborates on the importance of staff members being role models for students. Role modeling was something in particular that was mentioned by participants. Many reported that a healthy way for students to learn positive values and life habits was through watching their staff members. These participants felt that when the students watched them respect nature and each other, that they might pick up on these behaviors. In addition, some participants also felt that role modeling was a preferred way to help students with spiritual growth. These participants believed that spiritual growth shouldn't be forced upon students but that they should have an opportunity of exposure and that staff role modeling their own spiritual values was one way to expose students.

The literature and findings both support that the key element to making role modeling successful is through trust building between staff and students. The findings indicated that participants felt that students need to feel that they can trust their staff before they listen to the guidance they provide or use them as role models. A few participants specifically noted times when they saw marked changes in a student after they were able to make a trusting connection with them.

During this tricky process of rapport building, the findings support reports in the literature indicating that staff members must balance how much intervention to have in students' time with them. Fletcher and Hinkle (2002) state that pushing youth to attempt challenges that the student finds too risky is important, and a skilled understanding of the therapist to know when to push and when to initiate "challenge by choice" for the youth is crucial to holding both the trusting relationship and being therapeutically helpful to the student. Participants also acknowledge this balance. They mention both the "pushing"

element of their work and the importance of "challenge by choice." One participant

reported that it is part of the structure of the program to push students into uncomfortable

positions so they have to shed their defenses and learn new coping skills to be successful.

Another participant reported that the success of the program lies in its ability to let the

student progress at his own pace so he feels empowered by his own decisions.

The findings support reports in the literature that in addition to wilderness

breaking down barriers in a therapeutic relationship, wilderness also serves to challenge

youth in this program and awaken them to a larger sense of self. The literature reveals

solo expeditions that are structured into many programs as an important part of this

process. Two participants also focused on solo expeditions as a unique opportunity for

students to really get to know themselves without all of the typical distractions. Lyman et

al (1989) would go so far as to say that a spiritual experience happens for many youth in

wilderness therapy programs as they spend more time in the wilderness and, on some

unconscious level, regard it as a sacred space. This is an important part of the literature

review because Lyman et al tie together the idea of sense of self and spirituality. This is

also a point that comes up in the findings. One of the major findings is that wilderness

therapy strengthens connection to self or sense of self. This seems to be a crucial element

to a successful wilderness experience. Participants reported that wilderness therapy strips

away all the distractions; wilderness serves as a big mirror that gives students time to

really get to know who they are and what changes they want to make. This idea also

blends into other findings that suggest that spiritual growth in the wilderness therapy

programs also creates sense of self. The findings suggest that spiritual ceremonies and

rituals, religious and/or spiritual education, relationships with staff members, students'

connections to nature and the innate spiritual process that cannot be attributed to a

catalyst all create spiritual growth in a way that fosters a sense of self. In addition,

participants revealed that sense of self is important for their own spiritual journeys.

Spirituality and Therapy

The points just touched about spirituality are elaborated more explicitly from the

literature in the spirituality and therapy section. The findings here support an array of

different points from the literature. This support includes explanations of why spirituality

is not incorporated in wilderness therapy, reasons why it could be helpful, and

information about staff involvement.

First of all Walker, et al (2003) address one explanation of why wilderness

therapy programs have not embraced spirituality more directly. They contend that

spiritual integration in any therapy has a long way to go and is under utilized and under

addressed even in the traditional therapeutic setting. The findings show that participants

representing all programs state that spirituality is not addressed openly in their programs.

Many participants even reported that their programs specifically ask staff members not to

address their spiritual beliefs with their students. None of the programs have a named

spiritual component to their program. In fact, all programs have ceremonies and rituals

mimicking spiritual practices, but they are not named as such. Walker et al seem to

reiterate that even though wilderness programs have obvious spirituality present,

according to the findings, therapeutic programs are not willing to knowingly name it or

incorporate it as spirituality.

Pargament (2001) suggests that it could be advantageous for wilderness therapy

programs to start making this reluctant shift to incorporating spirituality. He names

specific techniques to do this. These include using the religious definition of forgiveness to help clients move from painful pasts, using culturally religious rituals that may help with transitions and introducing meditation as a method of anxiety reduction. The second and third ideas were also mentioned several times by participants. Many participants talked about the therapeutic advantages of having ceremonies for students as they progress through the program. These ceremonies created an opportunity for spiritual growth as well. Participants reported that this process helped students make meaning of their progress, give exposure to different ways to live their lives and give space to be spiritually reflective. Meditation was also something reported about many times in the findings. Participants agreed with Pargament that meditation was therapeutic for students. They claimed that meditation gave students a chance to strengthen connection to self. Participants did not mention mediation as an anxiety reduction method. However, if students are exposed to this practice and bring it into their routines, according to Pargament, this could be a bonus for the success of students. In addition to what Pargament has to say, Davis, et al (2003) stated that spirituality shows positive outcome in subjective well-being, self-esteem and physical health. These components were also some of the elements participants reported as markers of success for students. Participants reported that they could see differences in the way students carried themselves and presented themselves when they were ready for graduation. They stated that their self-esteem improved because the program empowered them. Participants noted that the wilderness challenges especially improved the students' self-worth and self esteem. The finding supported reports by Davis et al that spirituality does work as a function for what makes wilderness therapy successful for students. In addition, the

findings also indicate that through spiritual growth participants saw the same improvements that Davis et al showed. These participants found that through avenues such as spiritual rituals and ceremonies, education, conversations with peers and staff and exposure to new life practices that students were afforded the opportunity to make connections to self that link directly to improved self esteem and well-being.

This literature review section also addresses the role staff play in spirituality integration in wilderness therapy. The findings of Walker et al. suggest that those therapists who do consider themselves religious are more willing to use spiritual methods in therapy and address spiritual subjects than their non-religious counterparts. This aligns with the findings. All participants interviewed were spiritual or religious currently and or at some point in their lives. Many reported that relationships with staff members were a good way to expose students to spirituality. They all agreed that it shouldn't be imposed on students, but that students should feel comfortable talking with staff members about their questions or thoughts. In addition, some participants stated that this process would only work with staff members who were also interested in spirituality. They believed that it would not be appropriate to ask staff members to discuss spirituality as a job requirement. One participant went on to say that his experience with many different religions and spiritualities allowed him to connect with a suicidal student. He reported that having this knowledge is an added tool to be able to connect with students. Another participant reported that his comfort with spirituality allowed him to start a spiritual discussion group. These findings support the reports of Walker et al that spiritual therapists are more likely to bring spirituality into their work with others .

Spirituality and Wilderness

This section highlights the literature that speaks to spirituality present and evoked from wilderness. Several writers present ideas regarding connection to nature as essential to spirituality. Native American spirituality is mentioned. This section also includes awe-inspiring nature scenes and wilderness challenges as creating spiritual connection. All of this research is also mentioned by participants in this study.

Many participants acknowledge nature as a way for students to put their lives in perspective. As mentioned earlier, this experience can strengthen connection to self. Besthorn (2002a) goes so far as to say that awareness of nature is necessary to be able to achieve a holistic self. Others agree that nature evokes roots in specific belief systems, spiritual inspiration, and values of responsibility as spiritual beings (Besthorn, 2002; Burton, 2002; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Hageneder, 2001; Powch, 1994; Stone, 1971). The findings support the view that wilderness is a catalyst for spiritual growth and, in turn, for progress in the wilderness therapy programs. Participants stressed that being in the wilderness helps enforce a value system of respect and connectedness to one another. They also report that spiritual inspiration often happens when students see beauty in the wilderness or feel a happiness that reminds them of the times in their lives when they felt happy through their spirituality. This point is again reinforced by one particular study conducted by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999). They found that most participants in their study of women on a wilderness adventure reported that the actual experience of seeing new and powerful views of nature and the experience of being in a group during this experience inspired them spiritually. In, addition, many reported a "religious or spiritual experience" after working through a particularly difficult physical

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challenge that their wilderness trip provided. The findings of this study support those of

Frederick and Anderson that group connection was encouraged by spiritual growth and

vice versa. It also aligned with the participants' statements about the rewards from

physical challenges. Participants spoke of self worth improvement in physically

challenging activities and strengthened connection to self as a spiritual growth process.

It is also important to mention both the literature and findings reports of the

importance of Native American contributions to spiritual growth. Burton (2002) stated

that from a Native American spirituality, nature brings "contemplation and connection"

between them and the spiritual world. This is mentioned over and over again by

participants. Many recognized the cultural borrowings of Native American spirituality in

their programs. Even if the rituals were not named as such, the sage burnings, fire

ceremonies, use of feathers and sweat lodges were acknowledges as Native American

spiritual ways for students to grow spiritually and behaviorally.

Spirituality as a Part of Wilderness Therapy

The literature repeatedly puts forth the view that spirituality is actually essential to

the wilderness therapy process. Several writers have written about the importance of staff

and the role of Native American spirituality in this process. These points are also

supported by the findings of this study. Fredrick and Anderson (1999) first state that

extreme states of consciousness and sensory awareness found in wilderness experiences

lead to a personal sense of spiritual inspiration. This is more strongly put than the similar

comments made by participants in this study. The participants merely allude to the fact

that some students have been seen to be spiritually inspired in a way in the wilderness

that leads to more self awareness. Fredrick and Anderson, however, imply that it is

important to acknowledge spiritual experiences of the students because the wilderness therapy programs are putting these students in a situation where they will most likely encounter a spiritual experience. In addition, Powch (1994) goes so far as to claim that the essence of wilderness therapy includes a healing process on a spiritual level where the self realizes its connection with powers and forces greater than itself. This view reported in the literature is supported by the findings of this study. Some participants agree that having the students emersed in the woods awakens the students to the idea that there they are a part of a spiritual context, and this context gives a new perspective for them. Powch also states that it is the role of the wilderness therapist in this spiritual growth process to help guide and facilitate. This idea was supported by several participants' reports that staff are crucial to the spiritual growth process.

Again, Native American spirituality is mentioned. Hunter and Sawyer (2006) claim that Native American spirituality teaches its children about mastery without competition, responsibility to themselves, others and nature, and independence to make decisions for themselves and hold themselves accountable to those consequences. Here it seems that spirituality in the form of Native American cultural context seems to embody many of the intentional goals of wilderness therapy. As mentioned, Native American practices are integrated into the participants' programs and, according to Hunter and Sawyer, may invite more spiritual influences than first assumed. They also seem to hold a dual purpose of teaching values and skills that make for a successful wilderness therapy experience.

Limitations and Generalizablity

There were several factors that contributed to limitations to the generalizablity of the research. The sample size in itself was small enough, 12 participants, that it cannot represent the wilderness therapy staff population at large. These 12 participants only spoke from experiences of three wilderness therapy programs, which again is not representative of all programs. This is especially limiting because each wilderness program in the United States varies in a number of ways, and there is not a standard structure. The geographical area where the programs were located was also very specific as it was limited to western North Carolina. This limits the generalizablity because the participants all lived in western North Carolina and their interview answers were within the context of their regional culture and experiences.

The participant demographics also limit the generalizability. In addition to the limited variety of geographical origin, the 12 participants had little variety in age and race. All of the participants were Caucasian except for one African American. Participants did have more variety in age ranging from 24 to 64 with a mean of 34. There was also a balanced mix of women and men with five women and seven men. Also worth noting is the variety of spiritual and religious associations of the participants. Even though there was a strong range in types of spiritual identities, all participants had personal experience with Christianity at some point in their lives. A few currently practiced, but most grew up in a Christian house hold or within a Christian community. This does not bias the study too much because all of the participants reported doing their own spiritual identification work as they grew into adults, which took most of them away from their Christian beginnings. This created a mix of Agnostic, Zen Buddhist, Christian,

Catholic Monastic, Hindu/meditation following religions and spiritualities. In addition, several participants could not label their spirituality but rather acknowledged their spiritual journey that sometimes included many different religions and spiritualities. This mix, although rich, did not leave much room for any reports by participants with no spiritual associations.

The final relevant limitation for generalizablitiy is possible biases of the interviews because of the researcher's background. The researcher was particularly interested in this study because of her own experience with both wilderness therapy and spirituality. Because of the snowball sampling techniques she used, many of the participants knew that the researcher had a connection with wilderness therapy. They did not know her own spiritual identity or history. However, given that assumptions could be made about the researcher because of her wilderness therapy experience, this may have biased some of the interview responses. For example, details may have been missing because they may assume the researcher already had a basis of knowledge. In addition, depending on how much participants knew about her experience, they may have assumed she had positive or negatives opinions about wilderness therapy and may have geared their answers one way or another. Even though participants were not privy to the researchers own spirituality, this is a sensitive topic. Knowing the researcher is interested in the work and is from North Carolina, participants may have been more sensitive to their spiritual opinions in the interviews.

The researcher may have had her own biases in forming the interview questions and analyzing the data. Again because of her own associations with wilderness therapy and spirituality, she may have conveyed certain assumptions or opinions in the nature of

her questions or the way she presented them. To minimize this, the researcher stuck to a uniform interview outline. This outline included questions about the risks and possible hesitations of bringing spirituality into wilderness therapy. She also had this outline reviewed by others for second opinions on the objectivity. The data analysis portion was more difficult to control bias. The researcher could have been more prone to find data that confirmed her own personal hypothesis about her positive experiences with both wilderness therapy and spirituality. The researcher was intentional about looking for data that countered her assumptions and included a section in the findings reporting the risks and criticisms of integrating spirituality and wilderness therapy.

Strengths

In spite of the limitations there were also several strengths that increase the generalizablity of the research. The limitations section mention that there were only three programs represented in the data. However these three programs were very different from one another in structure, student population and spiritual implementation. This gives the reader more exposure to the variety of ways spirituality and wilderness therapy intersect. As mentioned earlier, there was a good mix of men and women, age and spiritual identification. It was also important that the researcher was not open with her own definition or explanation of what "spirituality" means. The participants were then free to be more open with their own thoughts on the spiritual issues. Finally, the researcher's own wilderness therapy experience was mentioned as a possible reason for interview bias. However, this could have also been a window for participants to feel more comfortable speaking about their experiences and able to dig deeper with their responses as they were not concerned about explaining basic concepts.

Implications for Social Work and Wilderness Therapy

This research was conducted to stretch the possibilities of what wilderness therapy could include in these programs to further enhance the services they offer their students. If spirituality were found to be either already a part of the work done in these programs or something that participants found to be an advantage to introduce to wilderness therapy, then this study can serve to make wilderness therapy a more helpful and intentional process. In addition, it is equally important to recognize that if spirituality is found to pop up in these programs for any number of reasons, then this work can also help to evaluate whether this is a helpful process for the students. Spirituality was found in the programs through intentional programming, staff interventions, unintentional experiences and practices students brought in themselves. Therefore, it is paramount that these programs' administrators investigate the best possible way to both use this information to enhance the success of the program and to avoid unhealthy ways students may be experiencing spirituality in their time at the programs.

It also seems from findings and the literature that spirituality can be a taboo topic in therapeutic work. Some reports indicate that the topic is avoided because clinicians, administrators and field staff members have limited experience and education working with spirituality. This brings the importance of this research to a broader level. This includes the need for the social work field to also be involved in embracing spirituality issues head on instead of ignoring their existence. The findings indicate that spirituality is a part of everyday experiences of students in wilderness therapy. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that clients in other therapeutic situations are also experiencing spirituality in their daily lives and in session. This suggests that the social work

profession needs to give further consideration to the integration of spirituality and therapy.

Further Research Implications

As mentioned in the literature review, there is not much research concerning wilderness therapy in general and almost no literature specifically studying spirituality in wilderness therapy. This research barely scrapes the surface of what can be built on the idea of intentional spiritual integration into wilderness therapy programs. The participants themselves gave inspiring ideas of countless ways to acknowledge spirituality when it comes up in the work and to use it to enhance the success of these programs. In addition, the criticisms suggest ways to avoid harmful introduction of spirituality into wilderness therapy and indicate that in the past, addressing spirituality has brought about complications in wilderness therapy programming and staffing. To continue to research wilderness therapy and possible spiritual intergrations can not only prevent hurtful experiences, but can guide the use spiritual experiences to enhance wilderness therapy.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

My name is Lauren Rothwell. I am conducting a study of wilderness therapy to learn more about spirituality present in the work. The study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work.

I am interested in how spirituality enters the work with youth in wilderness therapy programs. You are being asked to participate in this study if (a) you are currently a wilderness field counselor, and (b) you identify with some form of spirituality (this includes organized religion).

As a subject in this study you will asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. Questions will focus on how nature overlaps in the work in the wilderness and personal spiritual exploration. The interview will take between 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews will be tape recorded with your consent, and tapes will be coded numerically to ensure your confidentiality. Tapes will be destroyed after the interviews have been transcribed.

Your participation is voluntary. You will receive no financial benefit for your participation in this study. However, you may benefit from knowing that you have contributed to the knowledge of spirituality's presence in wilderness work with youth. It is my hope that this study will help the wilderness therapy field better understand how to utilize spirituality in the wilderness to better serve the effected community. You may also benefit from being able to tell your story and having your perspective heard.

The potential risks of participating in this study are the possibility that you might feel strong or uncomfortable emotions while talking about your experiences. In case you feel the need for additional support after participating in this study, you will be given a list of resources for mental health services in your area.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained, as consistent with federal regulations and the mandates of the social work profession. Confidentiality will be protected by coding the information and storing the data in a locked file for a minimum of 3 years. Your identity will be protected, as names will be changed in the analysis of the data. Your name will never be associated with the information you provide in the questionnaire or the interview. The data may be used in other education activities such as class presentations and peer editing as well as in the preparation for my Master's thesis.

This study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the study at any time before April 2008. If you decide to withdraw, all data describing you will be immediately destroyed.

_____   _____
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

_____   _____
DATE   DATE

If you have any questions or wish to withdraw your consent, please contact:
Lauren Rothwell at (919) 660-1017 or at spiritualityandwilderness@gmail.com.

Appendix B

Interview Question Guide

1) Tell me about the program you work for and what your role is.

2) Is there any spiritual component to this program? If yes, how so?

3) Do you define yourself as a spiritual person, if so how? If so, what are your spiritual practices?

4) Do you see wilderness therapy helping the youth you work with? What changes to you see in these youth as they progress through the program?

4) Is there anything about being in nature verses being inside that helps the youth succeed in this program?

5) Do you ever see spirituality enter these youth's lives while they are working through the program? How so? Or Why not?

6) Do you think it would benefit the youth you work with to have a spiritual component added into the program? If so, how? If not, why not?

7) Are there potential harmful effects regarding introducing spirituality in wilderness therapy? What might they be?

8) If you think that a spiritual component should be integrated into your program, what would it look like? How would nature play a role?

9) If there is no spiritual component in your program, why do you think that is the case? If there is a spiritual component, how could it be improved?

Does spirituality have a place in wilderness therapy?

I'm looking for wilderness field staff and administrators who would be willing to discuss issues involving spirituality in wilderness therapeutic programs.
This is part of my thesis work for my MSW.

If you would be willing to be interviewed at a convenient time and location for about an hour on these issues,
please email Lauren at… or call at….

Your participation would be greatly appreciated and contribute to the continuing work done to strengthen wilderness therapeutic programs.

Appendix D

December 18, 2007

Lauren Rothwell

Dear Lauren,

Thank you for your prompt return of your materials. Your corrections were fine and all is now in order. We are happy to give final approval to your study. I'm sorry we were not as prompt. This is the busiest time of the year for HSR and we do get behind sometimes!

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Jay Williams, Research Advisor