Adventure Therapy for Girls At-Risk: Responses to Outdoor Experiential Activities

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My Response to Erika Brown’s Article Critique:

I was a little biased reading this article critique because I want to end up at a location like this, so automatically, I felt like Erika chose a great article and had some good things to say about it. I agreed with Erika’s opinion that the researcher did a great job of pulling girls who came from different backgrounds struggling with different issues to get a wide range of people to see how they all respond to the same therapy. And I also agreed that the researchers made a major mistake by not interviewing the participants before they went through adventure therapy. I thought that Erika did a great job in her applications section by recognizing that an all-girls therapy group works the best and that the gap between adventure therapy and real life application needs to be bridged in some way.

Adventure Therapy for Girls At-Risk: Responses to Outdoor Experiential Activities

This article is about an interpretive study with at-risk adolescent girls using Adventure Therapy. Cari E. Autry, a doctoral candidate at the University of Florida in the Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism, developed this study to explore feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of girls at-risk. Nine girls between the ages of 13 and 19 participated in the study. They resided at a same-gender outdoor-based psychiatric rehabilitation facility where the nine participants would experience activities including 4-day backpacking trips and high and low ropes courses. Personal interviews were conducted throughout the study that was carefully analyzed to measure the effects of Adventure Therapy. Data collected from interviewing the participants showed that the girls gained trust, a sense of empowerment, and personal values. They also learned how to work as a team and the importance of teamwork. However, the girls
gained an awareness of the inability to transfer the values they learned from the activities back into their personal lives.

**Strengths of the Article**

Evidence has revealed that adolescent males and females respond differently in therapy because males are more likely to experience psychological crises in early childhood, whereas girls are more likely to experience such crises during adolescence. The Adventure Therapy program used in the study focused exclusively on girls’ needs. It is a same-gender facility where the girls do not have to compete with males. Through same-gender therapy programs the girls are more comfortable with sharing their feelings and thoughts without having males influence what they share. They respond to the therapy better if it is an all-female group.

There was a variety of girls participating in the study. They consisted of a combination of issues that included aggressiveness, depression, truancy, probation violation, detention, substance abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, eating disorders, and/or suicidal ideation or attempts. One participant was African American while the remaining participants were European American. Each girl had something different they were dealing with, but they all received the same therapy. The variety of girls shows that Adventure Therapy can have a positive effect on different types of people.

Using interviews to measure the participants experience helped the researcher to understand the “hows” and “whats” of the interview technique. The interviews were recorded (with the participants’ permission) so that the interviewer can collect, analyze, and report the participants’ responses. Conducting personal interviews helped the researcher to know their thoughts because the participants were the experts of their own feelings and perceptions. The results of the interviews showed that the nine participants gained trust, empowerment, and
personal values. They also improved their teamwork skills while participating in the experiential activities that were provided.

**Weaknesses of the Article**

Researchers did not do personal interviews before the girls went through the Adventure Therapy. Therefore, they may have not seen the whole process of improvement from the girls. The researchers maybe did not really understand how the participant felt at the beginning of the study so they were not able to get a full measurement of the whole experience.

Adventure Therapy can be scary to a lot of people. Adventure activities could have a positive impact on someone with emotional problems or the activity could totally backfire and cause increased levels of anxiety and stress during/after the activity. Having the activity conducted in a way that focuses on the participant would help the participants have a more positive experience.

Although the participants talked about the positive qualities they gained throughout the Adventure Therapy, they also mentioned how they were not able to transfer the values they learned into their daily lives. In the personal interviews, most of the girls emphasized how they would have great experiences and learn a lot at the adventure activities, but right when they got back to camp it was like nothing had changed. The girls did not want to talk about the experiences they had difficulty transferring some of the values back to life on campus.

**How the Article Can Be Used/Applied**

This article reveals that Adventure Therapy, overall, is a good thing for adolescent girls at-risk. Therefore we can apply this same method to adolescent girls at-risk today. We can continue to try and modify what was learned through this study and make it an even more positive process in the future. Learning from the weaknesses in this study can help improve the
Adventure Therapy in the future. Therapy can improve by focusing on the girl’s needs and knowing what is best for her. It can improve by figuring out new techniques to get the adolescent at-risk to apply what she has learned in adventure activities to her daily life.

**Person Reaction and Interest**

This article opened my eyes up a little bit more to the real world. I always had the belief that Therapeutic Recreation is great for everyone and it works every time. From reading this article it made me realize that there needs to be more to it. It is true that the girls did gain personal experiences throughout the process, but they did not know how to apply it. This teaches me that there needs to be more than just having fun. There needs to be a way to get the girls to apply the values they learn while doing activities to their personal lives. I also learned that every person is different and there are different ways to approach different individual’s needs.

**References**