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Completing the circle: The mindset and therapeutic implications of the wilderness solo

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COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: THE MINDSET AND THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE WILDERNESS SOLO

BY

FRITZ P. WENZLER
B.M., New York University, 2001

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
In Partial Fulfillment of
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in
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Date
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my wife and my mother. Both of you have supported me so much in my efforts.

Annie-

You are a fantastic wife for me and have more than compensated for things in our lives that I pushed off to the side for many hours while I either took off into the woods or sat in front of a computer. May we always enjoy our mutual experiences as we wander together through the wilderness of life.

Mom-

You have always encouraged me to follow my dreams. Thank you for helping to teach me how to be myself.
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ABSTRACT

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: THE MINDSET AND THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE WILDERNESS SOLO

By

Fritz P. Wenzler

University of New Hampshire, May 2007

The purpose of this research was to examine the background of the wilderness solo and consider the factors that most affect the outcome of this experience. After completing a literature review of this subject area, I went on my own solo and compared my mindset during this experience to my previous experience and knowledge of the solo. The conclusions that I have made are purely subjective and should not be taken as anything else. I believe, however, that since the solo is a subjective activity based upon the participant's inner reflections, it should be researched in a qualitative, subjective manner. In addition to my own personal learning that I have obtained through this process, I have also reviewed some potential therapeutic applications for the solo, most notably in the area of wilderness programs for at-risk adolescents.
While many studies have been completed to determine and/or analyze the effects of outdoor therapy programs, relatively few have focused on the therapeutic effects of the solo experience. The more specific information we can learn about the counseling implications that can be obtained from these experiences, the more we learn about the counseling implications that can be obtained from these experiences, the better we will be able to better serve the at-risk population in attempts to improve their mental health.

**Research Questions**

1. Do wilderness and solitude combined have positive therapeutic value for certain populations?

2. The solo experience is easier for some people than others. For whom is it easier for? What types of people are more likely to experience more difficulty with it?

3. What is the definition of a “successful” or “optimal” solo experience?

4. What types of counseling/psychology theories are most conducive to the solo process?

5. What are some of the main factors that determine the success (or lack thereof) of a successful wilderness solo experience? What are some of the elements necessary for providing the client with the optimal (most beneficial) solo experience?

**Hypotheses**

1. The combination of wilderness and solitude has therapeutic value for behaviorally and emotionally challenged at-risk adolescents, as well as anyone else who is going through a major period of transition in their life.
2. The solo experience is easier for more introverted individuals and more difficult for social, extroverted people.

3. A successful solo is one in which the person going through the experience learns something about themselves.

4. It is my belief that practices consistent with a transpersonal psychological perspective, along the theory of deep ecology, are congruent with the therapeutic application of the wilderness solo. William Glasser’s (1998) choice theory is also applicable to wilderness programs for at-risk adolescents.

5. The most important variables to consider in determining the effectiveness of the solo include the mindset (a sort of spiritual openness) of the participant as well as how the experience is framed and debriefed.

**Discussion of Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Much of this thesis discusses the positive therapeutic implications of the wilderness solo. It should be noted that the term “positive” does not by any means indicate that the individual enjoys the experience. The most important learning that takes place in our lives is not necessarily fun or enjoyable. Through facing risk, it is hoped that a participant will benefit psychologically by having a better understanding of who s/he is and how s/he ended up at his/her current point in life. The individual will thus be able to live a happier life and feel more accepting of his/her self in the long run.

Through a few days of intense aloneness, I believe that an individual has more of a chance of attaining mental clarity in his/her life than would be possible
during normal everyday modern life. I am also open to discovering results other than what I have considered as possibilities as I conduct this study.

As far as theoretical perspectives are concerned, I have mentioned transpersonal psychology, deep ecology, and choice theory. Coming from a transpersonal perspective, the wilderness solo is an opportunity for a person to realize a connection to all other living things, as well as providing a solid opportunity for one to observe oneself subjectively. It is my belief that through insight, the at-risk adolescent will be able to realize that his/her present behaviors are not allowing him/her to be the best person and live the best life that s/he possibly can live. Potential solutions to the individual's problems will be brainstormed and further developed as the group members debrief their individual experiences together. A combination of this transpersonal psychology and deep ecology, which specifically focuses on the relationship between human beings and nature, are the theories which I believe are most directly applicable to the therapeutic use of the solo.

Choice theory is another perspective used in therapeutic wilderness programs for adolescents. Although it does not relate directly to the inner experiences that can occur when an individual goes outdoors to get outside of himself/herself, the use of William Glasser's (1998) choice theory/reality therapy has been applied to alternative education programs designed for the at-risk adolescent population and its ideas can be pondered during the solo by participants of any age. Additionally, Glasser's ideas about attitude relate somewhat to my theories of mindset as being a determinant of the successfulness (or lack thereof) of the solo.
Background and Rationale

Throughout this thesis, I discuss a number of programs dealing with at-risk adolescents. This is because these programs provide examples of the application of the solo. Additionally, solo experiences are beneficial to this population because of the fact that its members are moving through a period of transition in their lives. This does not, however, mean that the adolescent group is the only population that can benefit from the solo. That having been said, the at-risk adolescent population has seen some success through participation in well-run (non-abusive) programs within the field of wilderness therapy.

Certain ancient cultures in the Americas have required their adolescents to embark on a vision quest, in which they deprived themselves of food and wandered into the desert alone for a few days. This ritual was originated as a rite of passage for these cultures. While the ancient vision quest rite has not historically been used solely for the aid of at-risk youth, modern wilderness therapy programs often utilize some type of solo component that is loosely based upon the vision quest. The fact that the vision quest practice has lasted for so long as an integral part of marking the transition from child to adult suggests that it is probably of some value. In modern, “civilized” cultures where important religious initiations are no longer commonplace, mainstream Western society is lacking positive rites of passage. Certainly, there remain a couple of motivating rites such as the high school graduation ceremony, but there are also some negative rites (in particular, alcohol consumption) as well as rites that simply lack spiritual meaning (obtaining one’s driver’s license).
Perhaps the closest things to common rites of passage that our culture possesses are the attainment of a driver’s license at age 15, 16, or 17, the first occasion upon which someone becomes sexually active, the legal permission to consume alcohol at age 21, and for some (probably the most meaningful of these), the opportunity to leave one’s home, family, and community to pursue a full-time education or job. While the latter rite is, for the most part, a positive and beneficial one, it is an opportunity that many youth never have. For those who do have the opportunity to leave home for education following high school, the spiritual importance of this major life change is, unfortunately, often ignored. Therefore, this population can also benefit from the solo experiences to be had from wilderness programs.

Again, although I have focused on the adolescent population, it is important to be aware of the fact that the wilderness solo experience can be positive and therapeutic for a number of populations, particularly if administered within the proper context. In other words, there is a certain amount of guidance, commonly known as framing and frontloading, that is necessary in order for the experience to have its proper effects and be considered a worthwhile endeavor. For some clients, particularly those affected by ADHD, prescribed activities other than simply sitting and reflecting may be helpful (McIntosh, 1989). The ritual should be preceded by a powerful and meaningful explanation of what is to happen, but some reality should be included. In other words, it is important to explain to the individual how beneficial the solo experience and self-reflection in general can be, but participants should also know that it may feature some moments of boredom as well. Journal writing is an important activity that can take
place during a solo in order to help initiate the beneficial self-reflection that is sought after. Moreover, the solo should be followed up with a good deal of processing so that its lessons are able to be carried beyond the experience itself. Literature supporting these ideas will be reviewed in Chapter II.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for the proper understanding of their use in this thesis.

**At-Risk**

People often ask, "At risk for what?" For the purpose of this paper, it is safe to say that the term refers to those youth who are in danger of dropping out of school and/or becoming involved in delinquency and crime.

**Therapeutic Adventure Programming**

This is a sub-category in the field of outdoor education:

Therapeutic adventure programming is aimed at changing dysfunctional behavior patterns, using adventure experiences as habilitation and rehabilitation... Participants in these programs generally possess patterns of dysfunction or destructive behavior that may limit or incapacitate their abilities to function in their communities. Therapeutic adventure programming can change people's behavior by showing them the impact of negative behaviors, offering them beneficial alternative behaviors, and augmenting what they may already do well. Clients in therapeutic adventure programs often learn new strategies for coping with personal issues and then transfer these strategies to critical aspects of their lives (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 23).

For the sake of this paper, the terms *therapeutic adventure programming* and *adventure therapy* will be used interchangeably.

**Vision Quest**

An experience based upon the Native American cultural rite of passage in which an individual goes off into the wilderness for at least 24 hours to be alone with no
food to find answers to major questions about himself/herself. The traditional vision quest takes place over a period of at least four days and is a period of complete fasting. Much of this paper will deal with how this traditional ritual has taken on other meanings within the context of modern wilderness therapy programs.

**Solo**

A term often interchanged with vision quest: For the purpose of this paper I will define the solo as the modern form of the vision quest used either in wilderness therapy programs for adolescents or as an individual experience of solitude (in this case, in combination with an outdoor setting).

**Wilderness Therapy**

For the purpose of this study, wilderness therapy can be thought of as adventure therapy involving multi-day backpacking, canoeing, and snowshoeing trips in natural settings as a form of correction and/or prevention that sets out with the purpose of teaching character education. Other adventure activities may include rock climbing, caving, skiing, snowshoeing, and challenge courses. Formal group and (possibly) individual experiences would also be included within this greater experience. This method of therapy challenges groups to participate by asking questions about what they find relevant and meaningful. Students are encouraged to learn through experiences and draw conclusions (either direct or metaphorical) from them. In order for the experience to be considered "educative", the students must then be able to transfer the lessons learned to daily life.
**Mindset**

One definition online described this term as “a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person’s responses to and interpretations of situations; the thought processes characteristic of an individual or group: ethos, mentality, mind, psyche, psychology” (http://www.answers.com/topic/mindset). For this paper, mindset can be defined as the attitude/state of mind of an individual (specifically, one who is embarking on a solo).

**Spirituality**

Considering the fact that there have already been volumes written on this term (not to mention major religions created around its ideas), it is clear that there are a number of ideas as to what the word means. To start with, it should be mentioned that spirituality should not be confused with religion. Instead, religion can be thought of as one means of expressing spirituality. Rather than try to clearly define the term on my own or with the assistance of a dictionary, I have chosen to use a description of what spirituality means taken from John Carroll (2004):

As to spirituality, the word refers to the condition of being of the spirit. The spirit is that part of us which animates us, which gives us life. It is that part of us which seeks transcendence, mystery, the other, that which seeks the BIG picture. It provides an essential faith in the future, a grounding for hope. It gives us the determination to persist and prevail. It has been said that when we lose our cosmology, our relation to the whole, to that BIG picture, we get small and settle for shopping malls (p. 4-5).

**Basic Assumptions**

For this study, I will assume the following:
1. The solo experience, when facilitated properly or entered into with the proper mindset, can bring about positive, therapeutic changes for a number of people, particularly those who are going through periods of major transition in their lives.

2. The reports given of my personal experiences will be presented in an honest manner.

**Limitations**

The reader should be reminded that any study in which the writer observes him or her self cannot be purely objective. This study certainly does not claim to be objective. I in fact believe that since the solo is a subjective experience, I will actually be able to provide more in-depth information on this topic by revealing more personal details of my experience than would probably be obtained through a more objective process of interviewing and surveying others in a data gathering process. Nonetheless, my reports can only provide the data gathered from one subject. It is necessary to realize that no individual's experience is bound to be exactly the same as another's.

Overall, the effects of the solo experience are likely to differ greatly from one individual to another. It then seems logical to assume that the data will lack generalizability as a result of such variability. This will also be the case since this is a qualitative research project that intends to go into further depth with a smaller sample.

While I will discuss the potential to generalize my findings to a broader demographic, I know that the solo participants' states of mind will be determined by their background and life histories and therefore recognize the fact that the
solo will impact each person in a separate manner. To some degree, the subjectivity that pervades this paper will be able to clarify my points about the importance of mindset in the outcome of the solo by enabling the reader to see the details in my life that have brought me to this mindset.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In reviewing much of the literature relevant to this thesis topic, I cover the broader topics of adolescent development and juvenile delinquency. Although the solo experience can definitely be utilized in a therapeutic manner for other populations, my experiences of seeing others complete this event has dealt exclusively with adolescents. Therefore, I have chosen to delve into the development of this group, especially those within this group who are most in need of this type of experience. After reviewing adolescent development and juvenile delinquency, I shall address the existence of wilderness used for therapeutic measures. The review will then cover descriptions of the solo experience often apparent in wilderness therapy programs for at-risk adolescents, beginning with the historical meanings for their inclusion, and then analyzing and critiquing existing articles, studies, and books related to the field.

Overview of Relevant Background Information

The idea of a wilderness solo experience has been around for centuries. Multiple Native American tribes as well as the ancient Mayan culture of Mexico have practiced vision quests as adolescent rites of passage for ages. These practices have involved youth going off into the wilderness on their own for either a designated amount of time (generally four days) or until the participating individuals find their “vision.” In the past, these practices have often been
accompanied by a period of fasting. Sometimes, participants have believed in the necessity to stay awake for the entire period of time, so as to avoid falling asleep and missing "seeing" something important.

Adolescent Development

Healthy/Normal Development

The first theory of adolescence from a psychological point of view was developed by G. Stanley Hall in 1916 (as cited by Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994). He described this period of a young person’s life as one marked with storm and stress. It is interesting to note that this is a Western view of the teenage years: more collectivistic cultures do not seem to have as many behavioral issues with people who are of these ages (Sue & Sue, 2003).

One of Sigmund Freud’s students, Erik Erikson (1968), developed a better-known modern theory of human psychological development that stresses the importance of the adolescent years. He described the crises that occur at each of eight stages of development. Adolescence is the time known for an identity crisis, typified by a conflict between identity and identity confusion. Erikson characterized this fifth psychosocial stage as a time of transition from childhood to adulthood. He labeled this stage as the most pivotal of the eight. It is a time for testing limits and breaking ties such as those apparent in school and family settings (e.g., relationships with parents). Most significant to the purpose of this paper is the fact that Erikson stated that adolescent development is a time for establishing new identities, life goals, and life meaning. The positive outcome of this stage results in a sense of fidelity and loyalty to other people, such as friends and family members. It is this aspect that leads to the relationships that
eventually become marriages during the time of early adulthood. Those who do not figure out their life goals, identities, and meanings are doomed to suffer from the prospect of identity confusion. "Erikson regards the inability to choose a vocation during adolescence as indicative of psychopathology" (Ewen, 2003, p. 184). Those who lack a sense of direction at the end of adolescence end up with the negative outcome of the identity crisis: identity confusion. This is defined as "the inability to achieve a sense of identity. Involves feelings of inner fragmentation, little or no sense of where one's life is headed, and an inability to gain the support provided by a social role" (Ewen, p. 175). The difficulty and turbulence that characterizes adolescence is described by Erikson in the following quote:

Like a trapeze artist, the young person in the middle of vigorous motion must let go of his safe hold on childhood and reach out for a firm grasp on adulthood, depending for a breathless interval on a relatedness between the past and the future, and on the reliability of those he must let go of, and those who will "receive" him. Whatever combination of drives and defenses, of sublimations and capacities has emerged from the young individual's childhood must now make sense in view of his concrete opportunities in work and love (Erikson, 1964, p. 90).

According to Erikson (1964), adolescence is also a complex time period characterized by the re-emergence of the sexual feelings latent during the individual's earlier years (although Erikson made a point of emphasizing the term psychosocial, rather than Freud's psychosexual, his earlier developmental stages are based upon the psychosexual ideas of Freud, albeit in a somewhat loose fashion). Furthermore, the adolescent individual must work to find meaningful resemblance between what one now sees in himself/herself and what he/she has come to recognize that others expect of her/him as well as their criteria by which the person is judged.
At-Risk and Delinquent Development

Adolescence and juvenile delinquency are relatively recent terms. Adolescence, as well as the strong emphasis that our culture places upon education, did not come to be viewed as a specific developmental period until the Industrial Revolution. Prior to this period, children shared in the work that was performed around the home with other family members. Additionally, they often shared in the attainment of family incomes (Aries, 1962). In previous times, large families were seen as beneficial due to the fact that additional children allowed more work to be accomplished on the farm. As the general culture of America began to change from rural to urban, many teenaged children were found getting into trouble with the law as the result of having little to do. This problem was addressed by the introduction of social institutions for adolescents (Platt, 1977). The first examples of these organizations were seen in Chicago, with the first juvenile court in 1899, followed by the original adolescent guidance center, the Juvenile Psychopathic Institute (now more politically correct with the name of the Institute for Juvenile Research) in 1909. Around the time of the roaring 20s, both guidance centers for teens and juvenile court systems were in place at various locations throughout the country (Rothman, 1980).

Currently, adolescent delinquency has continued to be prevalent, exacting a great cost to the social and emotional development of the individuals involved, as well as to society at large. There have been many efforts to deal with this problem through juvenile court systems at the local and state levels. One approach has been that of the wilderness therapy model.
A Need for Wilderness Therapy and the Solo

As if the developmental challenges occurring during the teenage years did not contribute enough difficulty to a young person’s life, modern adolescents now often have to deal with violence and substance abuse issues in the home among other stressors. The behavior that they present may be considered perfectly acceptable in their dysfunctional family environments.

In order to avoid gaining a criminal mentality that will impair their future decision making abilities as they become adults, these teenagers need to learn some behavior modifications. These modifications could be taught through traditional therapy, but because of the fact that at-risk youth are faced with a number of challenges in their lives, they can end up being challenging clients for most counselors. The traditional office setting of inpatient and outpatient services does not necessarily meet the needs of this population group. While making an argument for wilderness therapy in their book *Wilderness Therapy*, Davis-Berman and Berman (1994) identify some other factors that make the treatment of adolescents in traditional settings particularly hard:

For the process of counseling to be successful, most approaches require the client to be reflective, verbal, and disclosive. These propensities are foreign to many adolescents in need of counseling. Many of them come from families in which communication is problematic, making for strained dialogue in the therapist’s office. Then again, most adolescents are reluctant to see a “therapist” because of issues of trust or because they feel forced into counseling by their parents (p. 10).

The Berman book presents the background and history of the field of wilderness therapy in addition to giving examples of different applications and tying them to theories of counseling. One criticism that could be made of this book is the fact that, although it is a great reference for finding other sources on the field, the
authors frequently refer to their own program examples. While it is useful to read the work of researchers who have had years of experience and receive their valuable input, some could find parts of *Wilderness Therapy* to be self-serving advertisement for the authors' workplace. Having said this, let us go to the definition of the field given by the authors:

...Wilderness therapy involves the use of traditional therapy techniques, especially those for group therapy, in out-of-door settings, utilizing outdoor adventure pursuits and other activities to enhance growth. Wilderness therapy is a methodical, planned approach to working with troubled youth, although we envision a broader range of applications to other populations...It involves the careful selection of potential candidates based on a clinical assessment and the creation of an individual treatment plan for each participant. Involvement in outdoor adventure pursuits should occur under the direction of skilled leaders, with activities aimed at creating changes in target behaviors. Finally, the provision of group psychotherapy by qualified professionals, with an evaluation of individuals' progress and program effectiveness, are critical components of the program (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994, p. 13-14).

There have actually been multiple definitions for the term wilderness therapy given by professionals within the field. Some have said that for a wilderness therapy program to exist, it must include some trained and/or licensed clinical staff (Crisp, 1998; Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Russell, 2001a), while others have not seen this as absolutely necessary. Other definitions have suggested that perhaps wilderness therapy need not even take place in the wilderness at all, so long as participants are placed in a relatively unfamiliar and novel environment that challenges them to adjust to an experience that is new and different(Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Kimball & Bacon, 1993).

In 2001, Keith Russell wrote an article which looked at various definitions and sought to come up with an integrated definition. In the article, he states that a unified definition will be essential to the recognition of a field that is currently somewhat obscure and unknown. Russell's definition seeks to include three important elements: “a) theoretical basis, b) practice, and c) expected outcomes” (Russell, 2001a, p. 74).
In summary, Russell says that:

An integrated definition of wilderness therapy would contain the following key ideas: The design and theoretical basis of a wilderness therapy program should be therapeutically based, with assumptions made clear and concise, in order to better determine target outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (Russell, 2001a, p. 76).

Reflecting back on the other terms introduced in chapter I, it is important to recognize the difference between wilderness therapy and therapeutic adventure programming. In the definitions section of the previous chapter, a reference was made to Priest and Gass’ (2005) book, Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming. Here, the authors have used the term therapeutic adventure programming as a sort of umbrella under which wilderness therapy is included. Much of their book discusses the rationale behind ropes courses and their effectiveness. These courses are generally located in accessible areas where participants will be able to easily drive to and from for the day. Wilderness therapy, as defined by Russell (2001a), is then a form of therapeutic adventure programming. The Davis-Berman and Berman (1994) definition of wilderness therapy is somewhat similar in the sense that it does not require active participants to be placed in a true wilderness setting.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the terms therapeutic adventure programming and adventure therapy may be used interchangeably throughout this paper. It is worthwhile noting that, for the most part, Priest and Gass (2005) refrain from using the term adventure therapy. It is possible that the reasoning behind this is to point at that the more beneficial therapy spoken about here is
that which is intentionally programmed beforehand for therapeutic purposes. Therefore, the word programming has been added.

Lastly, it is important to revisit the term solo, since this is the most essential term in this paper. The word solo can refer to a period of time used for reflection, as described by Knapp and Smith (2005). They believe that the term covers a wide range of activities, from multi-day forays into the wilderness that include intense preparation and fasting to a 20 minute walk or meditation session. Moreover, they believe that the setting of the solo does not matter. In fact, they say that someone can even take a solo in a busy park, so long as s/he is reflecting to relieve stress or seeking a peaceful state of mind. In the following quote, Knapp and Smith (2005) describe the benefits of a solo experience:

Solo time can provide awareness, understanding, and clarification of one’s place, purpose, and direction in life. It can help one analyze relationships with others, the Earth, and divine and sacred powers. On the other hand, solo time can create fear, anxiety, physical discomfort, self-doubt, and insecurity if the person is not physically and/or mentally prepared for being alone or if the conditions of the environment become harsh and unyielding. There is clearly a connection between going out to nature’s various ecosystems and going into our mysterious mind. Sometimes in order to go inside ourselves, we need to go outside; and sometimes in order to go outside ourselves, we need to go inside to gather the strength and courage needed for the challenge (p. vi).

Having elaborated on the value of wilderness therapy and the idea of the solo, as well as having reviewed some of the other terms briefly introduced in the first chapter, we shall now examine the historical facts and events upon which the ideas of wilderness therapy came into fruition.

The Beginning of Wilderness Therapy

There are four primary roots for the field of wilderness therapy: the tent therapy programs, the summer camping experience, Outward Bound, and Native
American culture. This section of my literature review will now examine how each of these factors played a significant role in the creation of wilderness therapy.

**Tent Therapy**

The first approach described is that of the tent therapy camps that were set up in 1901 at Manhattan State Hospital East as a result of a lack of indoor hospital space during a large tuberculosis epidemic (Caplan, 1974). Basically, both the patients' physical health and mental attitudes improved as a response to the outdoor setting. Furthermore, their conditions regressed when they returned indoors at the end of the summer season. Unfortunately, there is not enough solid research available on this topic to be presented as valid and reliable data. Nevertheless, this piece of history has been recalled as among the first instances of using the outdoor setting (albeit inadvertently) as an element of positive change in hospitalized patients. The experience was considered to have been so successful that it was implemented for patients who had not been diagnosed with tuberculosis. In addition to the continuation of this work at Manhattan State Hospital East, over the next several years similar programs in Pennsylvania and New York State were used with similar results (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994). The key to utilizing this approach in the future would be to combine elements of hospital-type therapy with aspects of the summer camp experience.

**Summer Camps**

Thomas Hiram Holding has been known as a founding father of the camping experience (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994). In 1853 he founded a number of youth camps created for recreation. Other camps created at the time were designed to bring the young people of urban regions to rural areas and to
provide help to busy single women. Camp Ahmek in Michigan, created for fairly well functioning children, was started in 1929. Set up as a regular recreational summer camp, Ahmek was also the first program of its type in the sense that it came replete with behavioral challenges and goals to be met by the campers. Group behavior was a major goal, and camp counselors were expected to be positive role models whose exemplary attitudes and behavior could be mimicked by the young campers. Additionally, Camp Ahmek used natural consequences (e.g., not setting one’s tent up properly leads not to contrived consequences doled out by the counselor, but to getting wet if it rains) as a means of modifying behavior. Unlike other camps of the era, Ahmek documented the behavior modification that took place over the course of each summer. The combination of stressing recreation and mental/internal and physical growth as primary goals of the camping experience can be related also to the Boy Scouts movement, which was already in full swing by the time Camp Ahmek was up and running (Reynolds, 1942).

**Outward Bound**

Following the growth of outdoor therapeutic hospitalizations and summer camps came another key element of wilderness therapy’s earlier days. During World War II, Kurt Hahn developed a program in England called Outward Bound. The idea had come from the problems experienced by ships being torpedoed and sailors thus being stranded. After opening the Gordonstoun School in 1934 in an old Scottish castle, Hahn collaborated with Lawrence Holt and Jim Hogan in an attempt to deal with the merchant sailors who were dying as their ships were torpedoed and sunk. Hahn (1960) noted with some surprise that the younger,
fitter sailors were also the ones who failed to survive more often than the older, more experienced ones. This realization recognized the now popular topic of the interactions that take place between the body and the mind, and became the basis for Outward Bound, stressing the fact that the mental qualities that Hahn believed helped the more experienced sailors survive were at least as beneficial as the physical strength of the younger men.

Hahn feared society's decline due to dullness, and stressed the need for providing younger men with stimulating experiences in order to make a person stronger and more able to survive crisis situations. He drew from some of pragmatist William James' ideas in reference to what could be learned from war:

*The Moral Equivalent of War:* At the end of the nineteenth century William James, the philosopher, threw out the challenge to educators and statesmen: discover the moral equivalent to war. James hated war but he admits that war satisfies a primitive longing of men which will never be extinguished, to lose yourself in a common cause, which claims the whole man. War, so he says, shows human nature at its highest dynamic... This longing may be driven underground. There it remains in unconscious readiness to break forth in an international crisis, often weighting the scales of public opinion in favor of war (Hahn, 1960. p. 1-2).

Through programs such as Outward Bound, Kurt Hahn managed to combine the philosophy of William James with the ideals of experiential education, whose foundation had been laid by the likes of John Dewey.

The Outward Bound program built on the other two programs created by Hahn to integrate experiences to be had in the outdoors with a holistic character.
education of youth. Adolescents from various walks of life entered the Outward Bound program as a means of making themselves stronger not only physically, but mentally and spiritually as well. The idea was that the program can teach more than just outdoor skills to an individual on a backpacking trip. The focus was not to be so much on the technical skills of each individual, but more on the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes of will and inner strength. Outward Bound's creation also included an emphasis on community: “Kurt Hahn believed in community, and he instilled this into his students through goal setting and community service. Importantly, these elements remain central today” (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994, p. 53).

When presented with a novel experience that places himself/herself outside of his/her comfort zone, one goes through what John Dewey would label as an “educative experience.” Dewey's ideas, laid out in his book *Experience and Education*, formed the roots of Hahn's philosophy which turned into Outward Bound (which currently runs programs in different parts of the world including England, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand) and has since led to the creation of multiple wilderness/adventure therapy schools and programs all over the planet.

An important element of the current Outward Bound trip is that it includes a solo, an idea central to this thesis. The traditional Outward Bound experience lasted approximately 28 days. Near the end of the trip, the participant would go on a 24 or 48 hour solo. There are a number of programs for at-risk and adjudicated youth that have included the solo experience with varying degrees of success.
According to John Dewey (1938), people remember more from learning through experience than they do from constantly memorizing facts and numbers. In spite of the fact that Dewey was a philosopher and therefore did not actually apply his ideas through his own experiences, his thoughts of creating educative experiences that present both continuity and interaction are at the core of the Outward Bound organization.

The program started in Wales in 1941, and got its name from a phrase used to describe ships leaving the harbor for journey on the seas. The courses lasted close to a month at a time and were centered in the idea of "We don't teach people how to climb to make them better climbers, we teach them how to climb to become better people" (Gass, personal communication, October 4, 2005). Through the processes of adventure, students are able to realize the metaphors drawn between the Outward Bound expedition activity and their lives outside of the course. A term often used to describe this type of parallel life metaphor is isomorphism.

One activity often used today for the purpose of creating such an adventure in a controlled environment is that of a ropes course, in which various challenges are attempted in order to create the reflection necessary for experiential education. The advent of ropes courses came about during the early days of Outward Bound as a way to train young sailor boys to be prepared for the tasks necessary for successful sailing in rough waters:

Young sailors would swing on old hawser ropes, cross rope bridges between treetops, and climb up and down roped cargo nets or smooth wooded walls. The obstacle course was meant to mimic ships at sea. But not only was this training meant to prepare youth for abandoning ship, it was also devised to increase self-confidence as well as the ability to work well with others (Priest & Gass, 1997, p. 29).
The year 1962 marked the start of Outward Bound in America with a location in Marble, Colorado. This program, run with the work of Josh Miner and chief instructor Paul Petzoldt, was quickly followed by one in Minnesota. Paul Petzoldt later went on to found the National Outdoor Leadership School, but this program was focused more on hard/technical skills. Over the years, Outward Bound has spread to Asia and throughout the United States.

**The Present Philosophy of Outward Bound.**

The program continues to be influential for many people around the world. Additionally, Outward Bound has come up with ways of reaching more diverse populations. This has been done by working within urban school environments as well as running a number of courses for at-risk/adjudicated youth who are often court-referred.

Many changes have taken place over the years as far as the structure of Outward Bound is concerned. The activities, while always including elements of personal and interpersonal learning, used to be more focused on physical challenge and survival. In fact, while many of the founding principles of the Outward Bound program remain intact, the manner in which they are achieved has changed with the organization’s philosophies. Stephen Bacon (1988), in his work *Paradox and Double Binds in Adventure-Based Education*, has described the various underlying models that Outward Bound has used. He describes the earliest idea of “Mountains Speak for Themselves” (MST), in accordance with the paper on this topic by James (1980). This school of thought has criticized the act of analyzing, framing, briefing, and debriefing experiences occurring within outdoor education events, stating that people should not be told what to make of
their personal experiences, but should instead simply be allowed to “listen” to what the wilderness has to tell them. In other words, the wilderness setting is the therapeutic solution and provides the only means necessary in the attainment of goals such as the encouragement of personal growth, development of interpersonal and intrapersonal growth, willpower, ability to rely on whatever natural resources may be available at any given time, and the development of the wish to help and serve others. The MST ideas basically assumed that structure was not necessary to teach these goals. Generalization of the Outward Bound experiences to life outside of the program was assumed to take place naturally. The internal development was thought to be the responsibility of the individuals and not the course leaders (Bacon, 1988). This idea is quite contrary to the psychodynamic perspective of talk therapy, used from early in the 20th century.

Since these earlier days, the program’s views have shifted, now encouraging framing, briefing, debriefing, and generalizing. Among other sources, this type of adventure therapy is described in Bacon’s book on *The Conscious Use of Metaphor in Outward Bound* (1983).

Along the lines of the importance of properly processing the solo, Mcintosh (1989) conducted a study which suggests that a greater amount of processing before, *during*, and after the solo needs to be done for individuals with learning disabilities. Mcintosh studied Project DARE of South River, Ontario, as an example of a program dealing with at-risk adolescents that uses the solo experience. The author discovered that a lot of the population dealt with learning disabilities. Additionally, adolescents in general have most likely not developed
enough cognitively to be able to attain insights similar to those of older adults voluntarily going on a vision quest. Jung (1964) has spoken of the process of integration as something that generally begins taking place during the midlife period.

Instead of simply looking at the shortcomings of the usage of the solo with at-risk adolescents, McIntosh proposes a set of guidelines to be adhered to when working with this population on the prospect of a three or four day solo in four areas: pre-solo activities, expanded activities on the solo, reflective guidance through discussions and/or journaling while on the solo, and the teaching of component skills before the solo. Potential pre-solo activities include students grouping into pairs assigned with the task of keeping a fire going all night, as well as overnight solos. McIntosh then talks about encouraging activities, such as shelter building, that will help to prevent the participants from feeling overwhelmed by boredom. This makes sense in light of the fact that teenagers diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are less likely to want to sit still for days on end. McIntosh labels the pen or pencil and journal as a "solo package," and suggests that instructors assign specific journal writing topics/questions to be explored by the student during the period of solitude. Further facilitation through additional visitation from instructors throughout the solo is recommended. This will also help student deal with their boredom. Finally, the component skills to be taught beforehand include the following: the idea that everyone has a unique perception, how to put yourself into other people’s shoes, being able to look at oneself without a mirror, and confronting oneself and giving positive and constructive feedback. These skills can obviously be used in topics
assigned for the students’ journals. Based upon these ideas, McIntosh suggests that it may be through solitude and activities (as opposed to solitude and sitting still) that the members of this population are more likely to attain the desired insights.

Debriefing, in which the adventure activity is summed up and analyzed, is perhaps the most important tool in ensuring that adventure programming is purposeful and not just something that is fun, enjoyable, and teaching physical, hard skills. According to Priest and Gass (2005), this intentional programming became more prevalent beginning in the 1960s. As more professionals from various disciplines of human services became involved in the field of adventure programming, they brought with them techniques of analyzing and drawing comparisons between the activities performed and the participants’ lives in general. Among these techniques was that of debriefing. In spite of the fact that it has been frowned upon by those who adhere to the belief that the mountains speak for themselves, debriefing has remained an important element of the adventure therapy process that started with Outward Bound.

Joplin (1981) stated that debriefing is the final stage of five in her model of experiential education (the other stages being focus, action, support, and feedback). This model describes the process of experiential education as following a repeating spiral pattern, in which the focus stage circles outward before beginning a new cycle as the next experience builds on top of the knowledge that was previously acquired. In general, a properly facilitated solo allows for reflection to take place after the fact, which can be as powerful a
source of learning as the initial experience, as suggested by the following quote from King (2005):

I have experienced the official Outward Bound solo, consisting of four long days and three very cold nights in the northern New Hampshire wilderness. I’m proud of how I survived those days and nights, but I didn’t reflect much during the solo – I was too busy just trying to survive it. Only after reflection, when the buzz of doing it had worn off, did the experience have its full impact. I still reflect on it, and through these reflections I am still learning (p. 316).

Further information on creative ideas for analyzing adventure education experiences is found in Book of Metaphors (Gass, 1995). Some, however, would argue that there is still not enough done to relate the adventure experiences of Outward Bound to everyday life.

As I mentioned earlier, a key element to the traditional 28-day Outward Bound trip is that of a solo experience. The solo was originally designed as a test of survival but has since taken on meaning more as an introspective activity. Recently, many other, smaller programs have incorporated the use of the solo to some degree. We will look at the use of the solo within outdoor programs later in this chapter. Like Outward Bound, the solo generally takes place over a period of 24 to 72 hours, although some places have provided mini solos, which may only cover a brief part of a day set aside for reflection.

**Native American Culture and the Vision Quest**

A recent trend in the field has been the idea of a vision quest (as mentioned in Chapter I) solo experience, based upon the ideas of Native American tribes such as the Lakota Sioux (Dugan, 1985). Contemporary vision questers point out that the ceremonial aspects do not have to be limited to just Native American practices, but that they are based upon ancient archetypes of
human cultures in general (Foster & Little, 1992). As examples, they point to the Judeo-Christian history of both Moses and Jesus Christ spending significant amounts of time praying in the desert, as well as to the fact that Buddhist beliefs are centered upon the concept of quiet, personal reflection (Suzuki, 1998). The major religions' use of solitude is also referenced in Anthony Storr's book, *Solitude: A return to the Self* (1988). Storr mentions those who have had profound mystical experiences while spending days, weeks, and even years alone. Founders of great religions, such as Jesus and Mohammed have had these experiences:

That solitude promotes insight as well as change has been recognized by great religious leaders, who have usually retreated from the world before returning to it to share what has been revealed to them. Although accounts vary, the enlightenment which finally came to the Buddha whilst he was meditating beneath a tree on the banks of the Nairanjana river is said to have been the culmination of long reflection upon the human condition. Jesus, according to both St Matthew and St Luke, spent forty days in the wilderness undergoing temptation by the devil before returning to proclaim his message of repentance and salvation. Mohammed, during the month of Ramadan, each year withdrew himself from the world to the cave of Hera. St Catherine of Siena spent three years in seclusion in her little room in the Via Benincasa during which she underwent a series of mystical experiences before entering upon an active life of teaching and preaching (Storr, 1988, p. 33-34).

**Three Stages of the Vision Quest**

The process of the vision quest as adapted by modern folks seeking rites of passage during times of life transitions has been outlined by Arnold Van Gennep (1972) in the form of three stages: severance (separation), threshold (marge), and incorporation (aggregation). Modern vision quest programs such as Rites of Passage and the School of Lost Borders (both in California) created by Stephen Foster, co-author of *The Book of the Vision Quest* (Foster & Little, 1992), have taken as much as 12 to 14 days to implement this process.
The severance stage begins with the participants’ preparation. During this
time period, they are in contact via telephone and mail with the people who will
be their leaders during the experience. Foster recommends participants to begin
the severance stage as early as six months ahead of the event to take place. The
participant is to have a solid idea of what s/he plans to focus on as a reason for
undertaking the vision quest. Preliminary activities suggested by Foster and Little
(1992) include day-long mini solos, writing letters to the important people of the
client’s life, and even writing a will. This last activity is of particular significance
because it indicates a symbolic death and so is essential to the quest, which is
meant to represent death and rebirth at times of transition. Death and rebirth is
an archetype found throughout the world’s history (Jung, 1964). Immediately
prior to the threshold stage, participants go out as a group. They bring only what
they can fit into backpacks and hike away into the wilderness to establish a base
camp. Sitting together around a campfire the night before they separate as
individuals, the participants eat a big meal and (often anxiously) discuss what
questions in their lives they plan to find answers for while on their quests.

The threshold stage begins before dawn the next morning, as the
members leave the base camp in pairs. The two buddies eventually separate at a
cairn, or rock pile, that they have built. Over the course of the next three days,
each member of the pair will leave some sort of message or sign at the pile each
morning to indicate that he or she is okay. Everyone fasts for this time period
(unless of course someone has a health condition such as diabetes that
necessitates full nourishment) but, for reasons of physical safety (unlike some of
the Native American vision quests), must drink plenty of water (generally bringing
at least two gallons). The participants are encouraged to initiate their own original private ceremonies, to walk around, sleep, journal, or do whatever they need to do in order to utilize this time spent alone in reflection. Foster and Little suggest that locations with commanding views are often ideal, as they induce a sense of power in the participants, but urge questers to be cautious in the event of harsh weather. The participants must utilize their own ingenuity for creating sturdy and protective shelters out of just a tarp. Foster and Little also recommend that the participants do not structure their time too much, as part of the process requires them to allow themselves just to exist. Each participant is also encouraged to come up with a name for him/herself that relates to nature.

On the final night of the quest, the individuals will have constructed a circle of stones similar to that of the Native American medicine wheel. They will then come into the circle and are urged to stay awake until dawn. Watching the dawn brings about the moment of rebirth after the trials of the preceding days that facilitated their deaths.

The final stage of incorporation consists of the participants being brought back into society. Groups often will gradually bring themselves back. After returning to the base camp (where the leaders have remained the entire time in case an emergency were to occur), the participants share their experiences together through the facilitation of the leaders. The leaders facilitate the people's vision quest stories through a combination of reflection upon their experiences in the vision quest and knowledge of archetypes.
The Need for Modern Vision Quests

Solos based on the idea of the vision quest are not the only elements of traditional Native American culture that people have tried to incorporate into wilderness therapy programs. Programs such as Alternative Youth Adventures have tried to include other elements, such as readings and transition ceremonies such as those employed when a student is promoted from one level in a program to the next, not to mention the traditional use of fire created by friction or flint and steel.

Other programs have incorporated the use of the sweat lodge ceremony. The use of this ritual, a characteristic of some Native American cultures, has been viewed by some as a type of cultural theft. Generally speaking, this adaptation of other cultural traditions has been criticized by some who feel that, as the white oppressors of the Native cultures, we don't need to add insult to injury. Other Native Americans have embraced the idea of our society wanting to learn from what they have to offer; hopefully through a growing knowledge of traditional culture, we will become more empathic towards their peoples' plight.

Horwood (1994) suggests that instead of continuing to offend Native peoples through cultural theft, we should look to use traditions from the clients' own heritage. While singing Native American songs in a language that we cannot understand around a campfire might not be respectful, it seems evident that there is a lot to be learned from other Native American cultural traditions and applied to wilderness therapy programs. The main reason for their inclusion in current programs is the fact that most of our ancestral cultures haven't had nearly as much tradition based upon the interaction of people and nature. Of course we
need to remain culturally sensitive, but if we can couple the use of adapted practices such as the vision quest with a newfound respect and support of oppressed ethnic groups such as the Native American tribes, then both parties can benefit.

In short, some members of society have opted to adapt Native practices such as the vision quest because they believe that mainstream Western culture lacks similar traditions:

In traditional cultures, changes in life station were marked by regular ceremonies of passage, many like the vision quest... In modern times, the old ways are glaringly apparent in their absence. Dismissing native, indigenous, or "primitive" ways as mere superstition, or of little reference to an automated life, large numbers of us suffer changes in life status like victims: a burden to ourselves and others. Lacking inner resources developed from living a meaningful life, we often nurture a negative picture or ourselves as helpless pawns in the hands of fate (Foster & Little, 1992, p. 19).

Throughout The Book of the Vision Quest, the authors include anonymous passages from clients' journals, written while on the solo. Each example is part of the process that the person went through to avoid not being able to transition through meaningful moments in her/his life. Here I have included some quotes of adolescents who went through a vision quest:

My buddy and I sat beside our rock pile, our only means of communication, and wept before we departed. I think we're both feeling many anxieties and fears, that ahead of us lies a huge question mark. --Free Bird, 17 (Foster & Little, p. 75).

The thunder is shaking and I am scared...I can feel what loneliness is...I HOPE IT DOESN'T RAIN! I'm not the homesick type, but I would give almost anything to be with my parents. --Weak Stomach, Strong Heart, 17 (Foster & Little, p. 76).

It is from the roots of tent therapy, camps, Outward Bound and, in part, the sacred vision quest practices of Native American tradition that the modern
wilderness therapy program has developed and evolved. Also involved in the creation of the climate for wilderness therapy are the reflective writings of the 20th century.

**Further Writing on Solitude**

Solitude is a topic that has been written about by a number of authors. Of course the writings of Henry David Thoreau contained in his book, *Walden* (1854), are completely relevant to the topic of this thesis. This man spent two years in a cabin he had built himself in the woods of Massachusetts and reflected on life through his time spent alone. Rather than spending time discussing this work, however, I would like to focus on a more recent, up to date book called *Solitude: A Return to the Self* (Storr, 1988).

Although we are a society that constantly encourages people to look at their individual uniqueness, we still place great value on the ability to socialize amongst one another. If someone doesn't relate well with others and/or spends too much time alone, he or she is often considered to be dysfunctional or in some way inadequate. In his book, however, Storr proposes that it is as much of an accomplishment to be able to spend time alone as it is to relate well to other human beings. He points out that some of the most creative thinkers, such as Beethoven, Beatrix Potter, Rudyard Kipling, and Goya, have all achieved some of their works of art, writing, and music through time spent alone. The creative process requires days spent alone, enmeshed wholly in creating and being oblivious to the outside world. Storr also examines the fact that there is a big difference between the effects of being alone by choice and those resulting from forced isolation, which can make people literally go crazy.
If solitude has brought out the thought processes that have enabled the creativity of these people, surely there is some clear mental benefit to be sown from the experience of being alone in an outdoor setting. If not creativity, the experience of a vision quest/solo should be able to promote some insight and subsequent growth within a person. One apparent potential issue with the use of the solo within a program for adolescents is the fact that the participants are usually enrolled against their will by their parents. This small factor could taint the productivity of a solo experience if a participant were to interpret the experience as forced isolation, as if s/he were going through the motions as a form of punishment. It is therefore necessary to point out that the solo should never be used to penalize a program participant if it is to carry its full potential therapeutic value. This is also why programs often leave the solo portion of a journey until the end, after the participant has had full opportunity to “buy into” the program and its purpose. Ideally, the participant will also have learned more lessons upon which s/he will be able to reflect during the period of time in which the solo takes place.

**Examples of Research on Wilderness Therapy**

I have included reviews of three of many studies done to determine the efficacy of wilderness therapy in general. These are but a few examples of a wealth of existent information. For a complete understanding of this area of study, one should review one of the meta-analysis studies conducted. One that I found to be interesting was written by Cason and Gillis (1994).
**Cason and Gillis (1994)**

Described in the *Journal for Experiential Education* in 1994, this study combines the results of a number of studies previously conducted to promote the efficacy of outdoor education. This report actually claims to be the first of its kind. The authors claim that due to the significant amount of studies done since 1970, qualitative literature is no longer sufficient. The study takes a look at the effect size measurements derived from smaller studies in an attempt to make up for incongruent control groups. The purpose of this study is not only to look at the efficacy of outdoor adventure programs, but also to observe where the research in this field currently is, and where it should be in the future. How sound is the research that has been conducted up until this point in time?

The intense statistical analyses of these multiple studies make the methodology of this meta-analysis quantitative. This study tackles difficult comparisons, not only because of the different types of control groups amongst previous research used, but also due to the fact that many of them used different statistical analyses. In addition to the effect sizes, other numerical variables accounted for in the results section included standard deviation, and number of effects. Non-numerical variables mentioned included demographic information, program types, and the outcome measures (such as self-concept, behavioral assessment by others, attitude surveys, locus of control, clinical scales, grades, and school attendance). There were 147 effect sizes gathered from a total of 43 studies. The authors make a point of noting that the studies have included various population groups such as at-risk, emotionally and behaviorally disturbed youth, physically challenged, adjudicated adolescents, and so-called "normal"
teenagers. These groups were, for the purpose of the meta-analysis, narrowed down to categories of emotionally/physically challenged, adjudicated, unspecified, and "normal" adolescents. It is worth mentioning that Cason and Gillis found that 70.6% of the studies do not have randomly assigned control groups. The "normal" subjects were measured on fewer instruments, but can nonetheless be thought of as the control group here. The authors also made a point of analyzing the quality of the research design of each study used: some studies yielded more generalizable results than others.

The final section of the article lists summaries and conclusions. Based upon pre- and post-testing models, the average effect size (out of all 147) was 0.31. This means that, on average, the kids in the treatment groups were almost one third standard deviation above the members of the control group. The authors report that this number represents a 12.2% improvement in self-esteem, attitude, and behavior for the average participant in the typical adolescent outdoor adventure program. In addition to the variations previously mentioned, varying degrees of population types and sizes, as well as program lengths, were accounted for in the calculation of these numbers. The only real common factor among all of the programs was the fact that they all focused on outdoor adventure programs for adolescents and their potentials to promote positive change and growth.

Although this study acknowledges many of the other studies done in the field of outdoor education, it seems to be convoluted in the sense that it is trying to account for too many variables which are too different from one another to be
compared. At the very least, this article presents the variety of types of outdoor education programs that are out there.

**Russell (2001)**

In a study featuring thirteen participating wilderness therapy programs including Summit Achievement and Aspen Achievement Academy, the author uses the *Youth Outcome Questionnaire* as a pre- post- measurement tool to demonstrate the effectiveness of outdoor behavioral healthcare programs. This instrument assigns clients scores to determine how their attitudes and behaviors toward delinquency rank in comparison to others. Participants' average length of stay for these programs was 38 days.

The study shows that the participants' scores at discharge from the programs were significantly lower than they had been at the time of enrollment. No data was taken in the form of testing the participants after the discharge dates. If this study had been conducted in a longitudinal manner, it would have indicated whether or not the effects of wilderness programs for at-risk adolescents are long-lasting. My guess is that this was perhaps not done because the participants were too difficult to keep track of after program completion.

The benefit of this study is that it uses a well-known measurement instrument to look at the efficacy of a wide range of differing programs. The possible downside of this study is the fact that it perhaps includes programs with too many differences. Once again, the result may not be too far off from comparing apples and oranges.
Stringer and McAvoy (1992)

This article appears in a 1992 issue of the Journal of Experiential Education. The topic is that of spirituality in wilderness immersion programs. According to the authors, “the purpose of this study was to investigate whether the wilderness environment and wilderness adventure programs are conducive to spiritual development, and to investigate what the nature of such spiritual experiences might be,” (p. 58). After noting in the introduction that spiritual experiences in the wilderness have been taken for granted in the past, Stringer and McAvoy finally define spirituality in their own words before reporting definitions derived from one of the two groups interviewed. The researchers mention that “the concept of spirituality has traditionally included an awareness of and fusion with a power or principle greater than the self. Spirituality has often been described as that which gives meaning and purpose to life,” (p. 59).

Group A consisted of participants of a program called Wilderness Inquiry, where some of the members were physically or mentally handicapped and taken into northern Ontario for a canoe trip that was meant to be an overall positive experience. Group B focused on a wilderness leadership class of students from a university who were embarking on a backpacking trip in the Beartooth Mountain range of Montana and Wyoming. The methodology of the study was properly described as qualitative and, more specifically, one involving naturalistic inquiry.

Discussing the results, the report of this study describes some of the definitions of spirituality given by the study participants. These definitions, in addition to the information obtained through the surveys, were taken before and after the wilderness experience:
Personal definitions of spirituality were different for each individual, but many common themes emerged in both groups. These included the shared or common spirit between and among people; a power of authority greater than self; clarity of inner (or self) knowledge; inner feelings (especially of peace, oneness, and strength); awareness of and attunement to the world and one’s place in it; the way in which one relates to fellow humans and to the environment (especially in relation to service); and intangibility ... Many participants’ outlooks were shaped or influenced by traditional religious teachings, such as the acknowledgement of a deity, holding moral values, the importance of prayer, and the existence of faith. No one, however, confined his/her definition to a strictly religious view, and the majority of participants described broader or more general concepts of spirituality (Stringer & McAvoy, 1992, p. 63-64).

Comments by many of the participants provided decent insights about the value of wilderness therapy through the descriptive means of a phenomenological study. The strength of this study lies in the fact that it seeks to put the often hard to describe experiences of spirituality into words, not only those of the researchers but those of the study’s subjects as well. The main weakness of this study is the small, less than diverse sample of subjects.

**Durgin and McEwen (1991)**

This case study analyzed the experiences of four at-risk adolescents who participated in an adventure program called Touch of Nature, connected with Southern Illinois University. The course was 30 days in length, beginning with adventure activities from a base camp, and featuring a three week long expedition that ended with students taking solos. Beginning with an introduction featuring some background information on wilderness therapy programs, this qualitative study looks at the before and after records of four students on file, discovering that any effects of this program are short-lived. The authors, while noting that they have no concrete research/evidence supporting the efficacy of their statements, suggest that perhaps the reason for the unsuccessfulness of
these students is the fact that they didn't receive after-care that related to their experiences at Touch of Nature. This article was published in the *Journal of Experiential Education*.

There were three sources used for data: the **Wickman Andrews Behavior Intervention Scale** (WABIS), the **Youth Evaluation Statement** (YES), and a fact sheet completed by trip leaders at the end of the course. While there is enough information to allow someone to replicate this study, more details on the content of these instruments, such as sample questions from each of the three, could have been provided to help the reader get a better sense of what the instruments measure. The authors claim that there were hundreds of records, but that only the four used for this study were detailed and complete. These records were the only ones to contain unbroken records of regular reports taken for 6 to 18 months following the course. This is the explanation for the extremely small sample used in the study.

The results section, which encompasses the bulk of the article, talks about Steve, Tom, Sandra, and Greg. Some adolescents ended up leaving the program to go home, only to be hospitalized or sent to another program to deal with their issues. The inconsistent lifestyles of these children made it possible for only four of the records to be completed; the participants basically became hard to track down. This is simply an inference that I have made from reading the article. It's implied by the authors that the troubled homes were the source of the problems, but mental illness could also be an influence.

The conclusion of the article suggests that the program may be a good one based upon findings indicating the growth that occurred between its start and
finish, but that peer and family intervention must take place as well. The authors suggest ideas to help remedy the situation (perhaps some good topics of further study?), such as follow-up adventure weekends that can include family involvement, as well as longer courses. After care placement and proper transitioning are essential. Even the best wilderness course will fail in the long run without these elements.

Research of the Solo in Programs

This topic is perhaps the most important and significant area of this literature review. Here, I have chosen to include a rather brief synopsis of some of the research done on the solo activity as one aspect of a wilderness therapy/growth program. Some of the study examples included are taken from the recently published book compiling various articles on the solo entitled Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude (Knapp & Smith, 2005). All of these studies featured programs for adolescents or college students.

Daniel (2005)

The first study found in the “Research Results” section of this publication is the work of Brad Daniel. Like one of the earlier studies reviewed, Daniel focused on a spiritual program. The Discovery Wilderness Program is a Christian wilderness organization based out of North Carolina focused on running trips similar to those of Outward Bound. Towards the end of the trip,

The solo provides time for intense reflection, contemplation, and introspection. It typically follows a very strenuous part of the expedition, which means that the students have been pushed to their physical, mental, and emotional limits by the time the solo phase begins (Daniel, 2005, p. 87).
This study is significant due to the fact that it is, at least to my knowledge, the only one readily available dealing with the longterm significance of the solo. Another benefit of this qualitative and quantitative study is the fact that it included the questions asked of participants, thus allowing for exact replication.

The methodology used was not that of a longitudinal study (most likely due to a lack of time and resources), but instead closer to a cross sectional one, in which former program participants were contacted and surveyed (and later interviewed) about their memories of the solo experience and its impact on their lives. The sample size was fairly significant for a study in the field of outdoor education (227 of the 446 people who went on the expedition sometime at some point between 1976 and 2000 initially responded). Two hundred and ten people ended up returning the surveys filled out.

The main instrument used was a three part survey. The first part consisted of in-depth background questions that focused not only on basic demographic information, but also included questions in reference to religious beliefs and previous wilderness experiences. The researcher notes that obtaining such detailed information on every subject was necessary “because background experiences can be very important in determining perception,” (Daniel, 2005, p. 88). This statement relates directly to my belief that mindset is the main determinant of the outcome of a solo experience if one considers perception and mindset to be similar terms. The second part of the instrument included six open-ended questions that asked about the expedition’s significance. In particular, it sought answers describing what each participant felt was the most significant
part of the expedition. The third part dealt with a list of trip components and asked the participant to rate each of them on a Likert scale.

As far as the data analysis is concerned, the survey responses were typed and transcribed before being analyzed for important themes, which were then quantified. When analyzing keywords that showed up in the answers to questions asked of program participants, Daniel came up with six factors contributing to the life significance of the solo aspect of the Discovery Wilderness Program: novelty, timing, challenge, spiritual influence, perspective, and setting. I found these factors to be of significant relevance to my study: they all point to potential determinants of a successful or unsuccessful solo. In a way, all of these factors can work to influence the mindset of the individual involved.

Overall, multiple participants claimed that the solo had made their time with Discovery a major event in their lives, as described by one program participant: “There are about four or five life experiences that I treasure as pivotal points in my personal and spiritual development. Discovery would rank in the top three” (Daniel, p. 91).

Not surprisingly, the spiritual/developmental outcome of the solo bears resemblance to what was mentioned earlier in this thesis regarding the periods of solitude undergone by great religious leaders. Since Discovery is set up as a Christian religious program, it is not surprising that the responses given in the category of the spiritual influence of solo involve religious beliefs as well as those of a more personal spiritual nature.
Perhaps Daniel described the essence of the solo and its meaning in his own conclusions about the perspective afforded by solo:

Solo allows time for concentrated reflection, meditation, prayer, and decision-making. Life is reduced to the basics...This introspection can lead to an increased insight into self. Experiencing solitude in the outdoors has the potential to empower participants because they must face their fears and be responsible for taking care of themselves during that time (Daniel, 2005, p. 97).

Bobilya, McAvoy, and Kalisch (2005)

When searching for research done on the idea of the solo in conjunction with wilderness programs, Andrew Bobilya's name pops up quite often. This particular study used a subject pool composed of 126 first year students who had participated in the High Road wilderness orientation program prior to their first semester at Wheaton College. This program followed an 18 day schedule and featured a 24-72 hour solo with fasting as an option. This qualitative study revealed mixed perceptions of the solo experience. Some found the solo experience exhilarating, while others saw it either as a time to prove themselves to their instructors or as a period of napping and boredom. By taking into account some of the potential negative aspects of the solo as well as the good, this study proves to be objective.

Maxted (2005)

It only seems fair to mention a study that spoke more of the negative aspects of the solo. This study points out the idea that some of the previous studies have the solo have, through the authors' own subjectivity and desired results, glossed over some of the less thrilling parts of the solo experience: “Literature rarely points out the potential for things to go wrong during the solo, nor does it acknowledge the difficulties and problems that participants or staff
may face” (Maxted, 2005). The solo is something to be taken seriously and not simply romanticized. The author here interviewed students in two very different programs. One was a six-day school program; the other a long term residential setting. The report doesn’t give specifics, but only says that interviews with students took place at these two programs both before and after the solo experience during the years 2000 through 2004.

Maxted (2005) writes that most of the literature fails to mention the problems to be faced by both students and staff during solo time, nor does it focus on the potential for a number of things to go wrong. He points out the fact that solos are not always a positive source of enlightenment for adolescents. Maxted has suggested that solos not properly framed can result in boredom and loneliness that is too intense, as opposed to an ideal time of reflection. Mcintosh’s report is valuable insofar as it recommends providing more structured activities for the adolescent to partake in during the solo, stating that the at-risk adolescent population may not be able to reflect simply by sitting and thinking.

Through the mention of the darker side of the solo, Maxted intends not to degrade the experience so much as to help leaders become more aware of the potential for things to go badly. He gave examples of factors of loneliness and the connections made with youth in our culture between solitude and enforced punishment (time-outs are often used as a form of punishment for youth in our society; solitary confinement is considered the harshest form of imprisonment). These factors can turn the solo into a negative experience if not dealt with properly.
Research on Counseling Theories Relevant to the Solo

Earlier in this chapter the definition of wilderness therapy was discussed at length. In his article What Is Wilderness Therapy?, Keith Russell (2001a) speaks of a theoretical element that comprises one of the building blocks to the practice of this field. Under the heading for the theoretical basis element, Russell makes the following remarks:

Though each wilderness therapy program has a unique approach to wilderness therapy, there appears to be several common elements comprising their theoretical basis. Many of these common concepts are based on traditional wilderness programming ideas dating back to the 1960s in programs such as Outward Bound, but which are then integrated with an eclectic therapeutic model based on a family systems perspective with a cognitive behavioral treatment emphasis ... Interwoven in this integration of wilderness and therapy are often references to ceremony and ritual, including a rites of passage experience for clients. Wilderness therapy reflects rites of passage experiences practiced by cultures throughout the world, such as clients spending periods of time alone in wilderness solos to reflect on their lives and to receive insight and inspiration. Also included in the theoretical foundation are references to the use of metaphor, especially to represent the family, using an educational component with a sophisticated curricula that teaches communication skills, and traditional educational and psycho-educational lessons (Russell, 2001a, p. 74).

This section will attempt to link already existing theories to the therapeutic potential of the wilderness solo. It is based on research from Michael Cammack’s (1996) doctoral dissertation, looks at an article written by Brown (1989), and speaks of the applications of choice theory (Glasser, 1998) to adolescent wilderness programs.

Cammack (1996)

A study by Cammack (1996) mentions the issues of Outward Bound instructors he interviewed in the field having to leave because of solo participants running away or because some sort of rescue had to take place because of an
injury that occurred while on solo. His initial qualitative study was interesting in
the sense that he decided to go about interviewing instructors with years of
experience in facilitating solos instead of interviewing students. This study takes
the data obtained during these interviews and uses them to support the idea of
using a combination of transpersonal psychology and deep ecology philosophy
as bases for the solo component of a wilderness course.

Transpersonal psychology was founded in part by humanist Abraham
Maslow (1962). He was the first president of the Association for Transpersonal
Psychology. Originally coming from the humanist school of counseling theories,
Maslow once spoke of the hierarchy of human needs, physical and beyond,
necessary for attaining self-actualization.

Transpersonal psychology has been referred to as the fourth force in
psychology: the first three being psychoanalytic, behaviorist, and humanist
(Goble, 1976). Hendricks and Weinhold (1982) have created a working definition
of this concept:

Transpersonal approaches draw upon the first three forces while going
beyond to see humans as intuitive, mystical, psychic, and spiritual.
Above all, humans are viewed as unifiable, having the potential for
harmonious and holistic development of all their potentials (p. 8).

The word “transpersonal” refers literally to going beyond the person. Although
they don’t use this term, Knapp and Smith (2005), quoted earlier in this thesis,
are undoubtedly speaking of the transpersonal when they speak of getting
outside in order to get inside one’s self and going inside to get outside of oneself.

In addition to Maslow’s (1962) theory of self-actualization, much of Carl
Jung’s (1964, 1966, 1968, 1985) writing has influenced what has become
transpersonal psychology insofar as he focused a great deal of attention on
spirituality and the collective unconscious. In his theory of development, Jung (1985) outlines the process of the unfolding of the self in nature. Were he still alive today, Jung would have most likely supported the idea of wilderness therapy. In one of his lectures (1968), he states that exposure to nature has the ability to enhance our consciousness:

Moreover, simple people in natural conditions often have an extraordinary consciousness of things of which people in towns have no knowledge and of which townspeople begin to dream only under the influence of psychoanalysis. I noticed this at school. I had lived in the country among peasants and with animals, and I was fully conscious of a number of things of which other boys had no idea. I had the chance and I was not prejudiced (1968, p. 48).

Jung claims to have been conscious of more in the countryside environment than his peers who were raised in more urban settings. This seems quite relevant to transpersonal psychology in relation to the field of wilderness therapy.

Furthermore, Jung’s studies of spiritual practices across the globe as well as the study of dreams undoubtedly led him to interest in the vision quest.

Not too far off from these ideas of Jung’s is the thought of deep ecology (Naess, 1990). This is a concept that originated from Norwegian Arne Naess in 1973. This idea suggests that instead of looking at the world from a shallow ecology point of view (in which people are the center of the world and above all other beings), we recognize the interdependence of all living things as well as all of nature. Naess also states that adopting this philosophy will allow us to learn more from the natural world. Cammack phrases that deep ecology, or ecosophy (Naess, 1990), urges people to change their viewpoints of the world from anthropocentrism (people centered) to ecocentrism.
Cammack concludes that, from the standpoint of transpersonal ecology as suggested by the instructors he interviewed, solos can be tools leading to productive personal growth due to the ideas that we can learn from nature and have spiritual needs to be met.

**Brown (1989)**

Brown (1989) wrote an article on transpersonal psychology applied to the transformation that occurs within people through exposure to nature and the expansion of the senses. He speaks of specific techniques to be used, including meditation and archetypes. Archetypes, also mentioned in the Bacon book, are symbols common to our collective unconscious, and therefore transcend the separation of one culture from another.

**Choice Theory**

William Glasser (1998) is known as the head of the school of psychotherapy that believes strongly in the ideas of reality therapy and its underlying choice theory. These ideas have been placed under the umbrella category of cognitive-behavioral therapy but the ideas of freedom and responsibility are also quite apparent in choice theory. These points make choice theory's categorization as an existential theory equally as valid.

The at-risk adolescent population, often used to being able to blame others for their actions, is a prime target group upon which to use choice theory. This is also the largest population group to go through wilderness therapy programs.

Along the lines of Daniel's (2005) mention of nature and solitude forcing solo participants (from any age or population group) to face their fears and take

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responsibility, choice theory in the solo setting is instructive to the participants who no longer have the ability to blame other people. Nature can be blamed for its weather actions, but all that the participant can do is decide how to prepare for and react to the weather. If the weather is rainy and the participant gets wet because of not setting up a proper shelter, it is his/her fault for getting wet. In general, humans cannot control weather. Likewise, Glasser would argue that what he dubs as “external control theory” will not work. We can't control other people. In spite of frequent criticism for being too radical, Glasser’s writings provide fairly sound theoretical reasoning concerning topics of character education such as accountability. Glasser seeks not to blame his clients, but to teach them the concept of responsibility through the proper use of choice.

Alternative Youth Adventure (AYA) is a wilderness therapy program for adjudicated teenagers that I used to work for. Interestingly enough, within Alternative Youth Adventure's field manual (1999) is a section entitled “Reality Therapy Techniques” (based on the writings/teachings of William Glasser). Included in this particular section is the premise “Don't Punish” (AYA, 1999, p. 150). This sounds like somewhat of an oxymoron for a program that teaches discipline. Punitive measures in this case are different from logical consequences. One of the main strengths of wilderness therapy is the fact that it can automatically bring about natural consequences, such as a student's shoes getting wet when s/he leaves them outside in the rain. In an article mentioned throughout this chapter, Russell (2001a), in reference to the theories behind wilderness therapy, states that “A core theoretical element is the use of natural consequences as a therapeutic tool. Natural consequences experienced in
wilderness living allow staff to step back from traditional positions of authority to which the client is accustomed” (p. 74).

Natural consequences are ideal, but at AYA contrived consequences may also occur. Contrived consequences are then subcategorized as either logical or illogical consequences:

*Logical Consequence:* one that fits the crime and is metaphorically linked to the situation.
*Illogical Consequence:* Non-connected punishment for a crime.

This is where it gets confusing. An illogical consequence can be made into a logical consequence if one chooses the proper metaphor and connects the consequence to the crime (AYA, 1999, p. 58).

Glasser recommends discipline via consequences such as sending a student to her/his room when parenting, but cautions against using too many time outs, as they constitute external control psychology. This is a point where very few programs stick entirely to Glasser’s teachings. It would be extremely difficult for a program to refrain from almost all discipline, but even Glasser suggests that there are some aspects of life that need to be mandated by teachers and parents and are not to be negotiated by children or adolescents. An example of this would include the student who tries to refuse going to school.

Choice theory and reality therapy have been included in the field manual given to the employees of Alternative Youth Adventures upon the beginning of their training to work for the wilderness therapy program. Here, I shall briefly outline some key points of choice theory/reality therapy as referred to by AYA’s field manual.

1. The philosophy behind applying William Glasser’s ideas to a therapeutic program that deals with an adjudicated youth population starts with the premise that a person is basically good. The students who are sent to AYA are therefore...
not bad people, but good people who have made some bad choices. The ideal goal then is to help these adolescents learn how to make better choices. A person can learn a better way to meet their needs. S/he needs to always be able to make choices. Choices, in turn, can bring about long-lasting change that is beneficial to a person's life.

2. Glasser's version of social control theory states that all behavior is both purposeful and chosen. When relating to the students of therapeutic programs, staff members can use this theory by asking the what the students want from a specific situation or conflict.

3. Change must have intrinsic value. Students need to understand that a change in themselves will enable them to become better human beings and help them through life in the future. Unfortunately, the regular school setting does not always make the value of what is to be learned all that clear. Telling students only that they will be punished (with failing grades and a life that is subsequently difficult when they fail to graduate) if they don't learn what they have been told is important does not serve as a sufficient source of motivation for everyone. A person probably won't change unless s/he perceives that something is in it for her/him.

4. It is of utmost importance to remain focused on positive behavior. "An environment that focuses on positive behavior facilitates change more than one that focuses on negative action" (AYA, 1999, p. 150). This point is driven home by Glasser in his examples of factors that can help to make life more successful. This point goes well beyond this context of working with behavioral issues (AYA, 1999).
Glasser (1998) states that too many people go through psychoanalysis thinking that they must go back through past failures in order to learn from them. Glasser emphasizes that doing so doesn’t allow a client to move forward, as they end up just “depressing” more about their history. This is a radical idea not only to the field of therapy, but to other ideas. We study history to learn from the past, but Glasser strongly disagrees with the idea that those who fail to learn history are condemned to repeat it. For AYA students, there is a very strong emphasis to stay in the here and now. Staying in the here and now is easiest when both the student and counselor are as fully aware of themselves as possible. Techniques such as meditation and counting backwards can help a person to be more aware of his/her total behavior. They can help someone to avoid the negative consequences of an action by allowing the person to make better decisions in the moment. If a person’s needs can be looked into by asking what s/he wants, than the present behavior can be probed by asking the person about what is being done in an attempt to get what is wanted/needed. The next question to ask may be: “What are you doing to get it?” (AYA, 1999, p. 152). Once the person is able to understand that better options are available, s/he must come up with a plan to put these more positive options into action. In conclusion, it is apparent that some techniques of reality therapy that lend themselves well to application in a wilderness therapy program setting.

**Conclusion**

It is apparent that the idea of a solo used for therapeutic purposes has a lot of history to support its efficacy. From the days of the ancients through the modern days of Outward Bound, intentional solitude has been used as a tool of
psychological and spiritual growth. Many studies have been conducted since the
1970s to prove (and occasionally disprove) that wilderness therapy and the solo
are valid forms of positive treatment for individuals. Furthermore, Cammack's
interviews of Outward Bound instructors and their views from a transpersonal
ecology perspective can be combined with the use of choice theory to frame the
solo experience as something that can both transcend the ordinary through a
spiritual experience, and teach responsibility. I have mentioned a vast amount of
literature available in the realm of the solo being used by at-risk adolescent
programs, but have found less research information available in the area of
adults seeking vision quests during times of transitions. It would be interesting to
see how voluntary versus involuntary participation affects the soloist's mindset,
and subsequently, the solo's outcome. In the next chapter, I will describe a
methodology for taking a look at my own, personal solo experiences.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Method

For this study, I reflected on my past experience and knowledge of the solo that I embarked on as part of my ten day training for a field staff position at a wilderness program in August, 2002 before going on my own, self-devised solo experience this past March. This study was done in an entirely qualitative manner, and could potentially be described as a case study of myself. In the sense this study features journal entries written about myself during two distinct periods of my life, it could also be identified as one that uses narrative therapy.

Alternative Youth Adventures

Alternative Youth Adventures (AYA) was a wilderness program in Loa, Utah, that I used to work for. This program currently only has a branch based out of Colorado. AYA in Utah ran trips for adjudicated adolescents (male and female) who were referred by state court systems. Although most of the teenagers came through Utah’s juvenile justice system, many were also sent from the states of Michigan and Montana. None of the participants came to the program willingly (instead they were there to “serve time” for crimes that they had committed). The trips were set up to be a minimum of 45 to 60 days in length, depending on how quickly the participants progressed through four stages. The group evolved throughout time as the admissions process was a rolling one. The environments in which these trips took place included both the deserts and mountains of
southern Utah, on land managed by either the National Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. It is important to consider the fact that this land upon which we traveled was not all wilderness in the traditional sense of the word, as much of this land was roamed by free-range cattle and was accessible by a number of dirt roads. The students remained outdoors throughout the program's duration.

The fact that I have chosen to include discussion of a program that I used to work for, of course, has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include the fact that I am more knowledgeable of this program (and of myself, for that matter) than I could be of anyone else. The disadvantage of my familiarity with AYA is that I have already developed strong, biased opinions of it from my own personal, subjective experiences. My judgments of the program's solo aspect are, therefore, likely to be biased and potentially somewhat inaccurate as a result. This disadvantage, however, is a risk that I am willing to take. It is important to mention that, while this program had a clinical director who was a licensed mental health counselor, there were no therapists running one on one or group psychotherapy processes as there are with similar programs such as those run by the Aspen Education Group (Aspen Achievement Academy was one of the programs participating in Russell's (2001b) study mentioned briefly in the last chapter). While the field staff was informally trained in methods to use that are relevant to therapy, none of these people were required to have any education in a human services field. Almost all employees were, however, college educated. Groups were run on a daily basis (and as often as deemed necessary) by the field staff, as were individual meetings with program participants.
The solo was an extremely important aspect of this program. Each student in the program was required to complete at least two solos, one which lasted for 24 hours and another that was 72 hours long. These were spread out throughout the course and took place about once every three weeks. According to the AYA's (1999) field manual, the reasons for a solo are:

- To provide students with an experience that allows for self-assessment, introspection and the time for solitude and contemplation. To reflect on the backcountry experience thus far in terms of the group and themselves.
- Opportunity to heighten awareness of the natural environment and their role in it (p. 73).

As part of our ten day staff training, I went on a 24 hour solo. While this experience did include the provisions of a small amount of uncooked food, the other trainees and I had gone through an intense period of fasting earlier in the week as part of our training. To an extent the field staff training attempted to emulate the experiences of the program participants. The fasting, which was part of the newcomers' "impact" phase (before they were sent to join an already existing team), brought about almost as much personal reflection for me (probably due to the fact that it was done in silence as well) as the solo experience this week. I therefore reflected not only on the solo, but also the fasting (which I utilized in my more recent solo) portion of the AYA training.

**Procedure**

After reflecting on my past experiences and observations of the solo (both my own experience and the experiences of the students) I embarked on another solo journey. This time, I had designed the trip myself. I hiked into a location just south of Carrigain Pond and a mountain called *The Captain* in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and spent 60 hours there, sleeping in a quinze.
(snow cave/shelter) that I had constructed myself. This location was chosen due to the nature of its relative remoteness. It was approximately seven miles from the nearest plowed/open road and required a semi-bushwhack of about one mile following an old, abandoned logging road through deep untracked snow beyond a series of remote snowmobile trails. The sheer remoteness of this location ensured that I was not only alone during the duration of my stay, but also out of earshot of any snowmobiles.

After finding a cleared area to use as my destination, I simply reflected and meditated until leaving. I thought a lot about how this project, in a way, brought me back to the solo that I had experienced at AYA years ago. I also tried to observe what was happening to me and how my mindset, having experienced a similar solo once before and subsequently working at two wilderness therapy programs before going to graduate school to learn how to become a therapist (a decision inspired by my work at these programs), influenced my experience and its outcome—making it different than my experience at AYA had been.

I ate only after first arriving at the location and just prior to leaving. My decision to avoid fasting for the entire time was based upon concern for my personal safety: I needed to have some energy to keep warm as well as to prepare for the seven or eight mile hike out. During the time in between my arrival and departure, I hung my food in a bag and stayed away from it until it was time for my second meal. I brought only that which I deemed necessary (a tarp, warm clothing, a winter sleeping bag, and possibly something with which to ignite a fire) a headlamp, a camera, and a journal in which I wrote about my thoughts during the experience.
The solo in the tradition of the vision quest is meant to serve as a time of transition. I am currently on the brink of a major transition in my life. In a period of only weeks, I will have completed the requirements of my Master's degree in counseling. My journal was able to document the ideas of my symbolic transition over a period of three days. These journal entries provide the basis of my work for the rest of this thesis.

The idea here is that I have looked back onto my past knowledge and experience of the solo but with the counseling language that I have learned over the last couple of years in graduate school. I will later perform a theme analysis on the journal entries and compare what is included in them to what is already out there in the literature.

Once again, the main weakness of this procedure is the fact that it undoubtedly resulted in some biased data. I should also state that, while I made comparisons to the solo of AYA, my more recent excursion in New Hampshire left me in an environment vastly different from that of southern Utah. The weather alone (March in New Hampshire versus August in Utah) was remarkably different. To have made the experiences of the two solos more comparable, I would have had to have returned to Utah at the end of August to go to the exact same location as my AYA training solo. Due to time and monetary restrictions, this was not feasible. Nonetheless, I feel that my recent experience was a valuable expedition which yielded a great deal of personal growth and additional evidence that the solo/vision quest experience can certainly result in therapeutic growth, not to mention the influence of the participant's mindset on the outcome of the solo.
The idea of the solo was taught to all of the AYA trainee’s (who were then encouraged to take advantage of the solitude to reflect on the training week and come up with goals for the future). Later, we discussed how we had spent our time alone and shared our reflections with one another and our journal entries with the program’s training director. My recent solo was not framed by someone else, but was instead completely devised by myself. It was later debriefed in the form of a discussion with my thesis committee director. This meeting took place a week and a day after my recent solo.

Proposed Data Analysis

After obtaining data through the process that I have just described above, I intended to analyze the data by searching for common themes. I also have mentioned any themes that only occurred once on my trip, as these indicate potential significance. I have worked at relating the data that I obtain to that which has already been presented in the literature as well as presenting my own conclusions.

I realize that many qualitative researchers have used the help of others in order to more objectively categorize relevant themes. I believe that an objective observer would not be able to pick out themes in my personal experiences as well as myself because s/he could not possibly be aware of the personal insights that I have attained (Unfortunately, I may not have recorded every single insight in my journal. Some insights were also attained only after reviewing my experiences after they took place).
CHAPTER IV

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE: PAST AND PRESENT

The Past

Fasting

As I mentioned in the last chapter, although I did not actually fast during my solo that was part of the Alternative Youth Adventures training, I did fast during our training group’s emulation of “impact.” The thoughts and feelings that I experienced during this time were comparable to some of the reflection that occurred during both of the solos that I have written about in this thesis. Even though we hiked a number of miles (it seemed like about twelve miles at the time (although there is a good chance that my mind was exaggerating this), and were moving together as a group, we did so in complete silence (as dictated by our leader). After this stage of fasting had taken place, I wrote a journal entry that accurately depicts some of my reflections upon the experience of fasting in silence as well as the beginning of my first job in a wilderness therapy program. I have decided to include most of this journal entry here:

Wednesday, August 28, 2002- Morning

Well, we finally ate last night- three and a half bananas. It’s beautiful to be out here, aside from all of the cattle and the dirt road in front of us. Yesterday I learned how to accept a lack of [physical] nourishment. Sure makes you appreciate food!!

We avoided rain and now I’m guessing today will be really hot. I wish I hadn’t lost my clip on sunglasses before leaving. We’ll see what lies ahead. [It’s
been] so far, so good with this training. I guess I'll see how far I can push my body. Fasting while hiking above 10,000 feet was not the most enjoyable experience of my life, but not the worst either.

The last couple of days of training, also known as "impact," have certainly affected me and my senses. The main reason for this, of course, is that of food deprivation. I have never previously experienced hunger while carrying an uncomfortable pack like we did on the twelve miles or so that we hiked yesterday. Without a doubt, it has made me appreciate what I've always taken for granted. That's what the wilderness does to people in general. Yesterday and today have also given me respect for the students who are basically forced to do this. Hopefully they, in turn, will respect me more, knowing that I went through the same thing.

Along similar lines with respect, this type of activity gives one a whole new perspective on how to treat his/her self, and a want to respect his/her body by feeding it properly and staying in good physical shape. Ultimately, the biggest subject due respect here is nature. Nature created the mountains out here and the weather, bringing thunder and lightning and anything else possible. Nature does not contain restaurants or stores with food for sale.

"Impact" has proven my own levels of endurance (both mental and physical), as well as humbling me once again in the face of nature. It has certainly taught me patience and opened my mind to new ways of adaptation.

**Solo**

Here I have included the journal entry from my AYA training solo. This 24 hour period had been framed for us and we were asked to reflect upon and write
about some of what we had experienced throughout the week as well as our future goals.

**Sunday, September 1, 2002**

Being out on solos has certainly given all of us trainees time to think. [We’ve been asked] to use this time to reflect on what we’ve been through…I think that visiting Team Echo (and Charlie, briefly) has convinced me that as long as the staff thinks so, I belong here.

I have outlined a few goals that I’ve been thinking of while out here, but I’m not necessarily limiting myself to using these goals just for AYA; these are some life goals:

1) It is my main desire to continue to do what I feel is right. For many years I based my goals solely upon what was expected of me along that prescribed path of school, college, and career. During the two years following [my college] graduation, I remained undecided as far as a career choice was concerned. Therefore, [I believe that] I was made to feel guilty for simply taking temporary jobs and spending summers backpacking. Since coming out to Utah on a complete whim, I’ve finally seen that maybe I’m better off than some of my fellow graduates because, for once, I tried to follow my gut without trying to rationalize my entire life.

2) At AYA, I hope to become a strong outdoor educator while helping kids who are inherently good, but on their last chance to overcome some tough breaks. Currently, I don’t consider myself to have many teaching skills or even to be much of a leader, but I do have an extremely optimistic attitude as well as a strong desire to achieve the goals I set for myself. When I was a teenager who

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did not fit in due to a serious lack of athletic ability, I found strength through things such as Boy Scouts. [Attaining the rank of] Eagle taught me my love of the outdoors and proved that if I want to, I can be a leader. Perhaps AYA is my turn to pass on a message of hope to teens currently doubting themselves. Physical strength is also part of this goal: not to be a macho man, but for the sake of feeling healthy.

3) Last, but not least is my goal to travel and gain more life experience and education from different places, both through nature and others. This may not happen soon. It's more of a lifetime goal.

**Recent Solo and Mindset: “The Present”**

This is the major portion of my study that was intended to help me complete the circle that began back in 2002. In many ways, I am still wondering what comes after this circle, now near completion as this stage of my life ends when I finish working on my Master’s degree in counseling. Perhaps the mindset that I present through the telling of my experiences in the wilderness shed some light as to what the future may hold for me. I have decided that I may as well do this by printing the majority of my journal writings throughout the following pages. I have included additional comments and reflections on these entries in brackets, although it was my intention to save most of the analysis of this data until the next chapter. In some cases, as with the journal entries from the AYA solo, I have altered the entries slightly by writing out full words that had been previously abbreviated in my notebook or else to correct grammatical and spelling errors. I have also alleviated some of the more extemporaneous portions of the journal, in order to focus on material more relevant that makes clearer sense. This chapter
is intended to display the raw data as it was recorded in the moment, documenting my thoughts and feelings (mental, physical, and spiritual) during my solo experience. The writing from these entries is not necessarily professional in nature and tends to ramble on in a stream of consciousness format at times, but nonetheless accurately reflects what I was going through at the times they were written.

Thursday, March 8, 2007

The first entry from this trip was written the night before I left from the trailhead:

Tonight I am staying in North Conway [New Hampshire] at the Summit Achievement staff house (where I lived between March 2003 and July 2004 while I worked for my second wilderness therapy program as a “guide”) with a friend. It is all too appropriate that I am staying where the staff members of this program live. After all, it was while I was living here that I initially decided to try going to graduate school in order to learn how to become a therapist. [I was inspired by the work of the therapists at this program and thought that their role was one that I could see myself becoming a part of]. In a way, the experience that I am about to go through will be bringing things full circle for me. I am going to attempt to undergo a solo/vision quest experience of my own for the first time in almost five years.

Tomorrow I will venture into the bitter cold of New Hampshire’s White Mountains just north of here on my way to discover the area nearby Carrigain Pond. The pond sits near the top of a ridge between Mount Carrigain and The Captain at a little over 3200 feet in elevation. My hike in the morning should take...
me close to five hours. Even with snowshoes on, I expect to be struggling in some deep snow. I plan on driving to the trailhead shortly after sunrise, in order to make this experience a full 72 hour ordeal. I'll leave my site around the time of sunrise on Monday. I am well prepared for the weather. Although the typical vision quest disallows food, I realize that I may need some nourishment to keep me warm. The weather forecast calls for temperatures dropping below negative fifteen degrees Fahrenheit tonight, and that's without the wind chill and in the valley as opposed to in the mountains. It should warm up as the weekend continues though.

It's interesting that I am doing this during the season of Lent. As I wrote in my literature review, the vision quest includes the stages of symbolic death and resurrection to mark a point of major transition in the participant's life. I should note that although I have talked about the AYA solo, I have certainly spent a number of other nights alone in the outdoors. The AYA experience, however, was the only one in which I remained in the same spot for 24 hours. Usually when I backpack alone, I am constantly traveling. This trip will be an opportunity for me to work on simply "being" versus "doing." I also have not been alone in the woods for a number of years (not since my first backcountry ski trip in Colorado in May 2004).

I'm nervous. I already seriously miss my wife and I haven't even started yet. I am anticipating some serious mental difficulties within myself on this trip, not because of the weather so much as being alone with myself. I truly believe, however, that my mindset and feeling like I am in a very good space in my life right now will enable me to remain fairly open-minded and learn more about
myself simply by being with myself. Now I'll try calling my wife before I go to
sleep.

**Friday, March 9, 2007**

I made it to my site by a little before noon. I took my time. The way back
should take much less time (I'll be traveling downhill following my tracks where I
broke trail and packed the snow down on the way in).

I followed Sawyer River Road (which is like a trail during the winter
because it isn't plowed) for four miles before turning right onto the North Fork
logging road. I followed this until all of the snowmobile tracks disappeared. No
one has gone up this old, overgrown logging road recently, so I ended up sinking
down at least a foot with each step [occasionally I sank up to my knees], even
though I was wearing a pair of snowshoes. I eventually reached the end of any
trace of the trail and backtracked a bit to find a more suitable, open area in which
to make camp. I now have a superb view of The Captain (which is not really
visible from any maintained hiking trail) and Mount Carrigain and am waiting for
my snow pile to settle in the sun so that I can dig and carve out the inside and
complete the construction of my quinze, where I plan to sleep. Unfortunately, I
forgot to bring a ground cloth. Hopefully, I won't get too wet.

The weather is actually beautiful today and the temperature is a far cry
from what it was last night and earlier this morning (I felt my fingertips going
numb and had to re-warm them by shaking them violently in order to better
circulate my blood before even leaving the trailhead). Now I hope I'm not getting
too sunburned! The wind is light but feels like it may be picking up. It is a good
thing that I am not climbing any higher.
I've also realized that this doesn't have to be some hardcore hike. I'm probably close to two miles from the snowmobile trail and therefore don't expect to see anyone here. Between seven and eight miles was enough of a hike for the solo. All of this exercise has made me hungry, so I have fixed some macaroni and cheese over my stove. After this, I plan on hanging my food until my last day.

Back to the part about this not having to be a hardcore hike: I am realizing that this trip is going to be more about learning about myself than proving something to myself or anyone else. Even though I consider myself to be laid back, I have been noticing lately how I find myself rushing, even when I don't need to. I had to remind myself that I didn't need to drive fast on my way here. Hopefully, I can learn how to meditate better with a clear head here. I have decided to take off my watch and keep it in my pocket (to keep the batteries from getting too cold and dying) until my hike out of here. It is my hope that this will add to my distance from civilization.

**Saturday, March 10, 2007**

**Morning.**

I made it through my first night without a hitch, other than the fact that my legs didn't have enough room to stretch out. I have already piled up more snow, which I will carve out later today to add on to my quinze. All things considered, I actually slept fairly well. I dreamt that I lived in Clifton, New Jersey where my wife grew up and where her family of origin still resides] and was going to school at New York University again. My wife was going to a class with me. We were walking to a footbridge over the Hudson River when we realized that the bridge
was out. She was upset that we would miss the 9 AM class. In real life, my wife is unhappy that I have left her for a few days to do this solo.

It's interesting that I am doing this solo now because I haven't really allowed myself too much alone time since we've been married and I used to consider myself very independent. I've also believed that, to an extent, just hanging out with her was like spending time alone because of our incredibly close marriage. Being out here so far has been less lonely than I had thought it would be, although last night as I sat by a fire I had built I almost cried as I remembered our wonderful trip to central Maine last summer. It's amazing how wilderness and a fire can bring up such deep emotions.

It's nice to not have much to be responsible for here. All I have to do is make sure that I stay warm and hydrated (simple, but not necessarily easy tasks). Staying warmer may be more difficult today than yesterday. In spite of the predictions of higher temperatures today, the sky is somewhat overcast and therefore the sun's heat reflected off of the snow is absent. Precipitation has also been in the forecast. I can hear the wind on the ridges above, but it is not yet here. Staying warm today will also be more difficult than it was yesterday since I plan on continuing to fast.

I looked at my journal from the AYA experience in 2002. Due to my having gone through an impact stage similar to what the students there first go through (miles of hiking to an unknown destination without food for 24 hours) taught me how adaptable I can be.

I also talked about reflecting on my having followed a different path than other people my age. Prior to this 2002 solo, I had been made to feel guilty for
this. Now I am happy with the decisions I have made. I wrote about following my intuition more. I feel that I could use some more work in this area of my life and in my counseling sessions [with clients]. Thanks to the encouragement of my thesis committee, I have been able to trust my hunch in coming out for the more recent solo.

Another part of the AYA journal that stood out was my having written that I was still unsure of how well I could work with teenagers. This was a new experience for me at the time. Now I feel more confident of my capabilities.

At the same time, going back to what I said earlier, my difficulty in trusting my gut comes from somewhere. As I mentioned in my internship seminar, I think it comes from being told I wasn't that good at a lot of things as a child. During one class, I felt an emotional breakthrough in which I was able to connect my lack of confidence to a day in high school when my father told me he was concerned that I didn't have more friends. He was not trying to hurt me, but the comment upset me and apparently still bothers me. What bothers me so much about this? Is it the fact that I feel like I disappointed one of my parents? Is it because I feel like my self wasn't good enough (and maybe sometimes still isn't)? [Even though he was completely sober when he said this to me,] maybe it has something to do with my dad and my discomfort with the alcoholism that ultimately killed him. In the AYA journal, I spoke about having felt out of place as a teenager due to my limited team sport athleticism. I spoke of maybe being able to give at-risk/adjudicated adolescents a message of hope during what I know is a tough time in life. Today I understand that there was more to my difficulty with adolescence than not being good at some sports. Fortunately, my parents raised
me well, [preventing me from having to] deal with some of the tough breaks that the kids I've worked with have experienced.

I think that a big part of my allowing myself to experience solitude this weekend is about becoming more comfortable with myself. Although I am friendly with others, I don’t rely on human interactions to hide some darkness underneath... Though I might not do this, I am aware of the fact that I distract myself by doing things constantly. I have learned through my studies about the benefits of getting closer to my true self by just being instead of doing, but have had [a] tough time putting this idea into action. I try to meditate for 10-30 minutes a day at home, but find that I spend a good deal of that time thinking about what I will be doing when I'm done. I am currently realizing that the wilderness setting for solitude works particularly well because it is removed from the distractions of daily life. What's more is the fact that the setting is not associated with the other stuff that has to get done. Therefore, it's much easier to come out here and not think about the grand old laundry list that needs to be observed in civilization.

One thing that fascinates me here is the sound (or lack thereof). On the hike in yesterday I would stop to catch my breath at times and be astounded by the stillness and quiet. This morning I noticed how it was so quiet that all I heard was the sound of my heart beating. If I listened closely enough, I thought I could hear the fluid in my ears. The sounds of the birds and the squirrels here definitely grab my attention. Why do people focus all of their energy into the lists of things that, in the grand scheme of things, really aren’t that important?

As far as the mindset being the biggest determining factor for the successfulness of the solo is concerned, I have concluded that part of this
mindset includes discipline. It might be possible for someone to spend a solo sleeping or thinking about things other than himself/herself. It takes discipline, therefore, to work on the self, even in the ideal environment of the outdoors. On this trip, I am trying my best to avoid the temptation of raiding my food bag. I also want to ignore my watch. I can tell the time better by seeing where the sun is in the sky than by reading some numbers on my wrist.

Later on.

I have been trying hard to meditate for a while with mixed results. At one point I found myself so relaxed that I started nodding off to sleep. It seems to me that achieving a sense of centeredness and relaxation while being fully aware of the present moment is a point of meditation. I feel that my remaining open yet disciplined will allow me to better myself in a manner similar to the self discipline that has helped me train and improve my running time in marathons and other races. It's self discipline that has allowed me to complete the work necessary for me to finish graduate school.

I am a little concerned that during the rest of the day and tomorrow I will become too used to this novel environment and phase out the sounds I hear and the feelings I get. [At the same time,] I doubt that this will happen. The beauty out here is too powerful.

Early afternoon.

After a brief bit of sunshine that allowed me to air/dry out my boots and get my feet comfortable, the clouds have returned. I'll finish my quinze before the precipitation starts. The breeze is back too, but I'm glad that I've been
experiencing the great, open outdoors instead of staying tucked away in my little snow cave.

Mid afternoon:

I completed my [additional] work on the quinze. Now I should be able to lie down flat with my feet fully stretched out.

Upon completion of this task I went to the small open brook to retrieve water and realized that I am really hungry. [I realize that eating before returning] isn't what's outlined in The Book of the Vision Quest (Foster & Little, 1992), but those authors also talk about vision quest in the Sierras or the Southwest during summer, not New Hampshire in the winter (all [other] things aside, I'm thankful to have slightly warmer weather, otherwise I wouldn't be able to sit out here and write). I also have a hike of at least seven miles waiting for me and want to be properly nourished. With the hunger thus far I feel slightly dizzy and have a hint of a headache. Part of this transitory quest requests me to die and be born again. By fasting, part of me is symbolically dying. I feel that this physical, material hunger is going to turn into a spiritual soul food that should nourish me mentally. I'll admit, however, that I have questioned my sanity a bit for doing this [quest].

Speaking of transitions, I will be graduating from the counseling program and probably moving, getting a job, and buying my first home within the upcoming months. All of this has not yet sunk in. With any major life change there is a period of grief following due to the loss of something. As I sit here on my [sleeping pad] and sleeping bag I realize that leaving my schedule and schoolwork behind is a change in and of itself. I will also be leaving our apartment on the river [in the upcoming months]. Additionally, settling into a new
area and meeting new people [may] have to take place. On the one hand, I’m scared of changing and leaving behind something that I am happy with. On the other hand, I am excited to take advantage of the opportunities ahead of me and grow. These upcoming months will include some death and rebirth in my life, as will this solo.

Earlier I mentioned my concern about becoming less conscious of my [environment]. Actually, the opposite has happened. I am currently noticing the scents of the small conifers growing in this area.

Back to the mindset idea: my wanting to complete this experience makes it more likely to be successful than if I had no desire to seek something out of this. As far as implications for the use of the wilderness solo is concerned, this is an important point. If an adolescent is sent to a program against his/her will, what good will it do if s/he is thrown into a solo right away? Some programs have rotating teams, leaving this scenario a distinct possibility. A future study might include studying whether or not this is true. Outward Bound waits until the end of a 28 day trip before the students go on solos. Even those who attend a wilderness program voluntarily are likely to benefit more from having waited until the program’s end, when there is more to reflect upon. Likewise, I have waited until towards the end of my graduate studies to go through a solo that is more involved than the solo I went on as part of my AYA training.

It's starting to rain a bit. Therefore, I'm going to return to my quinze and block the entrance from the rain with my pack. Actually, the sun is partially visible, so it's hard to tell what the weather will do next. You know the old saying about New England weather: If you don't like it, wait ten minutes and it will change.
I had a weird thought that came to me: Humans often worry about having some great meaning to their lives. Psychologically, it can be very difficult to live a life that feels meaningless/purposeless. Why do we have to have meaning to our lives? None of the animals seem concerned about this. They wake up and find food on which to survive and, for many creatures, this is their whole existence. I guess human's brains are just too powerful. From a more spiritual perspective, the idea that there is something more powerful than us can be humbling and change our sense of meaning from something materialistic to something less tangible but more real. I cannot imagine anyone coming out to experience nature for a decent amount of time not believing in a greater power than ourselves. Even the most rational, atheistic scientist would at least realize that the weather is greater than us.

I am thinking of myself now not so much as alone as free. Within this [immediate] area [that I have chosen as my solo site], I can be or do whatever I want without anyone else looking on or knowing (other than through my writings, which the reader must trust to be honest).

In the vein of this existentialist section, it should be mentioned that Victor Frankl (1963) talked about responsibility coming with freedom. I know that I previously mentioned not having to be responsible for much other than keeping myself warm, dry, and hydrated, but now I realize that I am also responsible to continue my self discipline in order to make the most of this experience.

The sun has dropped below the ridge and the temperature has dropped. The sky is cloud-covered and precipitation will probably arrive by later tonight. The cloud cover should insulate and keep the air from getting too cold (as
opposed to the starry sky last night). I shall now retire, even though the time is probably only about 6PM.

**Saturday, March 10 or Sunday, March 11 (Nighttime)**

I have been waking up on and off listening to rain showers outside. How can it be raining? Didn’t I see bits of ice forming in my water bottles shortly before going to bed? I hope it turns to snow and/or freezes because I am a little concerned about the quinze melting and collapsing on top of me. I did bring a tarp with me in case this snow shelter doesn’t work out. Maybe I’ll set it up tomorrow.

I’m also nervous because I feel hungrier now. The hunger is no longer a growling sensation [as] much as an almost sick series of pangs. The dizziness has turned to shaking. This is getting tough. I guess I’ll try going back to sleep.

Earlier I found myself on the verge of tears when reading a little note from Annie. I then felt the urge to think about my dad again. Checking to see if I could bring up some deeper feelings to sit with, I started repeating, “I love you, Dad.”

[Since I started writing this entry,] the rain has stopped again. When I open my eyes and don’t use my headlamp, everything is literally all black. Even the thin crack between my pack and the doorway can’t be noticed with the dark, cloudy night sky.

**Sunday, March 11, 2007**

It’s definitely more difficult to write with my heavy gloves on, but it’s too cold to take them off. I could crawl back inside the quinze, but there’s not much room, so I can’t sit up in there and write.

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Well, I made it through another night. After I wrote about waking up and hearing the rain, I had two dreams that I remember. One was scary, the other wasn't so bad. In the kind of scary one, I returned to the house I grew up in. My mom was there, but so was this young man who I recognized but was unable to place a name to. He had apparently needed a place to stay for a little while, so my mom allowed him to move into my room and use the other bed there. I remember going to use the bathroom and finding an incredible mess. What I thought was a bunch of dirty rags ended up actually being a pile of used wash cloths.

I went into the family room next door where this guy was lying on the couch with a bunch of types of junk food (maybe this had something to do with my hunger) around him. He was snacking on popcorn or chips.

My mom soon entered the room and exploded at him for being so lazy: “I let you stay here, and what do you do? You trash the place! The bathroom is pretty much ruined with your crap and puke stains everywhere and now you're trashing this room!”

The young man began to quiver and shake while huddled in a curled up ball. He started to cry. At first, this reminded me of a wimpy little boy. Then he reminded me of my father shortly before my parents got divorced: He would sometimes drink himself into a barely conscious stupor and my mom would yell at him. He would then call me into the room and cry about how badly he felt that I had to see him in this horrible state. I didn’t know what to do or say during these incidents, even though I [was] a fairly mature seventeen or eighteen year old.
In my dream, the young man said something along the lines of, "You don't understand what I went through with my mom." When we asked him what he was talking about, he took off and left the house. My mom and I were both worried that he would try to hurt or kill himself. We searched for a number where we might be able to reach him. I went to my room. Although he had made a bit of a mess here, it was not yet trashed like some of the other rooms were. I was looking through all of the little pieces of paper that I keep in the front of my address book. I thought, "If I can't find the number, I bet my friends the Martalus twins will have it."

I was confused about why the lamp on my bookshelf had no shade on it. It seemed that the ceiling was lower and there was no longer enough room for a lampshade. I called for my mom but didn't hear a reply. The lights began to flicker and it was dark since it was night. I didn't hear my mom. I began yelling for her the way I used to yell for her when I had nightmares as a little kid.

"Mom!"

I screamed until I woke myself up. Once awake, I was frightened by the sound of the gusty wind outside the quinze.

I went off to sleep again, only to have another strange dream. This one was about placing a bid on some small rural property by a farm. The property had two older small farmhouses. My plan was to sell one of them. I went from this property to my cousins' in Connecticut. There I was chastised for having missed their big dinner. "I would have come sooner, but I didn't know it was going to be earlier," I exclaimed.
My uncle and aunt were also there. They had come all of the way from Michigan. My uncle told me not to worry. He was cooking another meal for me.

What am I to make of these dreams? They’re nothing like any dreams that I have recalled recently. The first one clearly has to do with my childhood and adolescence. My mom sold that house last year. I guess the sale upset me more than I normally admit. There were just so many memories attached to that house [since it is] the only one I lived in until I moved out on my own. (I now wonder if my mom would have sold it sooner had I not lived with her after graduating from college). My sister has really had some relationship problems with Mom, starting with grudges she has held against our mother for having divorced Dad, to selling the house, to not being more enthusiastic about her marriage and pregnancy. On a deeper level, this first dream was clearly about my dad. Maybe the fact that memories of him were triggered by this young man indicates that, since I am still a young man, I see part of me in him. Perhaps I am still scared of becoming my dad (although, unlike the man in the dream, when my father was sober, he was definitely far from lazy. In fact, he probably worked too hard). It’s obvious that there is still some discomfort and resentment towards my dad, although I loved him very much. I doubt I will ever reach closure on this issue, but this solo is as good a place to process this stuff as anywhere else that I can think of. I’m guessing that this dream started off of the memory of my saying, “I love you, Dad,” earlier yesterday.

The second dream seems less obvious, although bidding on the property must have something to do with the major life transitions ahead of me. I think Jung spoke of dreams, compensating for the gap between our true selves and
our personas that we act out during the day. I’m here just trying to be myself for
days here. What could I be doing wrong?

I meditated a little this morning after getting more water. I’m wearing a
couple of more layers today, due to the wind. The sky was perfectly clear when I
got up, and I had the opportunity to watch the moon set. Now there are some
darker cumulus clouds blowing in. It might snow later.

Hunger isn’t bothering me as much now. Although I feel physically weak, I
also feel more at peace.

I know that past vision questers have talked about conducting some sort
of ceremony towards the end. I feel that any sort of special ritual other than what
I have been doing thus far would be too contrived. The only ritual I know is prayer.
This also seems appropriate since it is a Sunday morning during Lent. My
Christian beliefs, combined with the fact that this solo is during Lent, have
definitely contributed to my current mindset on this journey. If nothing else, the
words I hear in church will probably have some new meaning to me.

Another area of the quest that I have decided to not go through with is
forcing myself to stay awake throughout the final night. I have opted out of
staying up all night for safety reasons.

Later.

The sun has softened the snow a little, so I wonder if the actual
temperature is above freezing yet. I’m going to hedge my bets that the quinze will
last another day. It doesn’t feel nearly as warm as the now wet snow would
suggest. I guess the fact that I haven’t had anything to eat in about 40 hours
might have something to do with it, as does the wind. The sky is almost completely covered with clouds now. Let's hope that it's snow and not rain.

Although I'm not as conscious as I was last night, I feel that it's affecting me more. I just went out to get more water and found myself clumsier than I have been yet. I carelessly dropped the cap to the iodine tablets (which I have been using to treat my water) in the snow. Speaking of snow, some flurries are starting to fall. Fasting is certainly bringing an interesting aspect to this experience. I realize that it can't be used too much in programs for adolescents but I believe that it would be a beneficial, humbling experience if it was to be used in the same manner that the food-free impact stage of AYA can teach people to be thankful for sustenance.

Any trace of blue sky has now disappeared. I will meditate some more and then start thinking of fixing a meal in case rain comes instead of snow.

Later on.

The wind keeps reminding me of other places on other outdoor trips. In particular, I am thinking of a couple of trips that my wife and I made to the Presidential Range (not far from here). On our first trip, we stayed in the Gray Knob cabin and [reached the peak of] Mt. Adams. It was October. I have two framed pictures of us on my dresser, one of which we ended up making into a Christmas trip.

The other Presidential trip that comes to mind is when we hiked from Pinkham Notch over Mt. Washington in mid-November and followed the ridge to Mt. Adams before descending to Gray Knob and hiking out to Rt. 2 in the morning. At the top of Mt. Washington, amid the snow and wind, with
temperatures in the single digits, I gave my wife an engagement ring and asked her to marry me. It's been over a year and a half since we've been married and I still feel sure that this is the best decision I have ever made in my life. In many ways, I have her to thank for the career path that I have chosen. I met her when she came in to Campmor (where I was working at the time), and gave her my number. She called back the next day. We hung out for about twelve days before she left to go to Utah. I rode out with her on the train as far as Chicago, using visiting my sister and going to my cousin's high school graduation in nearby Milwaukee as an excuse. After a couple of weeks working on trail crew in Maine that summer, I decided to join her in Utah. While I was skeptical about it at first, I soon became engrossed in the work I was doing at AYA and later at Summit. I eventually realized that I wanted to leave working as a guide for at risk adolescents before I suffered from burn out. The woman who is now my wife was no longer working there and my being gone all week, every other week wasn't what either of us wanted as our relationship grew. I realized, however, that I had an interest in working with people as an agent of change. I observed the roles of the therapists at Summit and realized that was what I wanted to do.

Here I am at the end of graduate school. I've talked about searching for jobs in schools or mental health centers, but I would really like to work for a program that uses the outdoors to facilitate change. Even after having interned at various non wilderness settings, I still feel that the full immersion of experiencing the outdoors is the quickest way to achieve a therapeutic breakthrough. As I think about my wife and write about my future as a counselor, I am completing the full circle that began with my training at AYA. It seems natural that I have framed this
solo to be much more intense, and I am sure that the debriefing I go through with my professor upon returning will be quite involved as well. Jung (1964) spoke of the archetype of the mandala, a symbol in the form of a circle. Although my dreams last night may not have tapped into the collective unconscious, my circle completion through this solo can be related to Jung’s idea of a lack of finite, solid boundaries. As opposed to being thought of in a straight, linear manner, it is possible to learn in a cyclical way.

We learn the best through direct experiences. Each time we get to repeat a particular experience, we have the opportunity for further character development and human growth. Just as this idea holds true for my growth in the outdoor solo setting, so it exists in terms of my counseling skills in relationship to my internship experiences. As I mentioned in the literature review section of this thesis, many outdoor educators cite the importance of framing/frontloading and/or debriefing (Priest & Gass, 2005). The internship seminar (and counseling supervision in general) can be thought of as going through a cycle of constantly debriefing one session before framing the next one. This frame of mind can greatly improve what is worked on during the subsequent session for both the counselor and client. Doesn’t the term “frame of mind” sound similar to the word “mindset”? Each time we repeat a cycle of framing the experience, going through it, and debriefing it, we enlarge the circle as it encompasses more knowledge and skills. This has been suggested by Joplin’s (1981) spiral model of experiential education.

During the literature review I also used the word transpersonal. Certain situations, such as the solo, have the capability to take us out to a larger circle
than other situations. The transpersonal moments take place during experiences that are away from the concrete, yet teach us something that can be transferred to daily life. Transpersonal means getting beyond the person. Some of these moments are difficult to describe in words, but I feel I have been experiencing them here as I have used both the silence and wind (as examples) to reflect on my life, both past and present. Then there are moments such as the present that just feel empty. There seems to be nothing left to say right now.

Minutes later.

I've been taking note of the way the clouds have been blowing over head. White fluffy wisps make way to light and then dark gray, and then light gray changes back to blue sky. A transpersonal moment took place while I was watching this, before I had time to think about it.

I will be leaving here tonight. Judging by the sun’s location in the sky the afternoon is well underway. Although I can’t quite put words to it yet, I feel as if the warming weather has signaled a sense of rebirth to come about in me. It might make sense for me to pick up on this as a signal of completion. I have already been out here for at least 55 hours. My solo several years ago lasted only 24 hours. I will clean up the fire pit, fix my meal, and go. I’m so hungry now I am imagining the smells of food! By the time I clean up after the meal, I should have just enough time to make it back to my car a little after dark.

Late afternoon.

I have decided to leave on this exhilarating feeling I have. Not only am I feeling great from my first meal in days, but I feel a sense of refreshment and renewal. I guess it is a feeling of confidence, knowing that I can mentally handle
being with my true self without man made distractions for a few days in the
wilderness. This place is a beautiful spot well off the beaten path. I may return
here again to revel in the settings beauty and recall this experience. If not, I
certainly know that I will go on many more excursions into the wild- whether the
location is the woods of the East or the deserts of the West.

Flurries are falling again as I write. I just witnessed a perfect snowflake
that looked like a paper doily fall on my black snow pants before quickly melting a
second later. What a perfect ending example of an other-worldly experience in
the present!
CHAPTER V

WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS MEAN?

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I analyze and further develop the ideas that were presented in my journal entries that served as the data for my thesis. This is where I have tried to tie my past and present experiences together in an attempt to conclude what elements may be most important for the success of a solo. I have reviewed the answers to the questions outlined in the first chapter. I have also reviewed the ideas of the mindset, framing/briefing and debriefing, as well as the relationship between theory and the solo experiences that I have endured.

I hope to have related my experiences to those of the at-risk youth in a program by discussing the potential implications of this study. Perhaps there are some other populations for whom the solo can be of good use. I have also listed recommendations for possible additional studies. In the future, I hope to have the opportunity to work at another program that implements the solo. Through my experience writing this thesis, I hope to have come up with a list of pointers for others embarking on a similar adventure.

I have decided to begin these conclusions with a final journal entry that I wrote within days of ending my solo in the White Mountains. Here, I reflected upon my experiences after having been away from them long enough to observe them in an objective manner, but within a time period short enough to still have them fairly fresh in my mind.
Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Well, I have been home for a couple of days. I've had some time to think about what actually went on over the weekend. I think that part of why I returned on Sunday evening as opposed to Monday morning was that I felt like, to some degree, my dream on Saturday night was the climax of the solo. What possibly could have come along more powerful than that over the next 14 hours?

The other aspect of the trip that I was thinking about was the way my senses became so keen. Granted there were more clouds where I was then in some surrounding areas because of the mountains, but I realized I had worried too much about the weather. A few flurries made me worry that a huge storm was about to erupt. Part of this may have come from not having camped in the winter for about a year. Another part of this probably stems from being alone and more fearful as well as attentive. I particularly noticed the winds during the night. They woke me up. Granted the winds on Sunday really did pick up, I may have been more sensitive to the wind and rain Saturday night because I was alone.

All of this got me thinking. Were my senses really overly acute when I was alone in the wilderness, or could it be that my senses were simply working to their full capacity (as opposed to usual)? Is it possible our senses normally don't work to full capacity because they are numbed by the human world? There is so much we have to block out in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed by our senses, yet we can be aware of so much when we have the time and space to do so. It has been said that people who can't sort out all of their sensory input become (or already are) schizophrenic. On the other hand, why should it be considered psychologically healthy to block out so much? I don't know how it
would be done, but it would be interesting to do a study on the difference of sensory reactions. My wife made a harmless comment yesterday that I was “back in the real world.” What is the real world? If man’s world is real would this mean that wilderness is artificial? Has the overabundance of television programming and video games become what today’s adolescents interpret as reality? This is yet another indicator of what can be so powerful about the wilderness for at-risk youth.

Questions Answered

In this section, I have summarized the answers to my research questions.

1. Both of the solo experiences that I went through and discussed in this thesis took place at moments in my life when I was facing periods of major change. While I have already made it clear that I am currently going through a major transitory period in my life, I have not yet said much about the transition that I underwent around the time of my earlier solo.

   My travels to Utah resulted in my work for AYA. While I may not have been completely aware of it at the time, the start of my job there marked a major point of transition in my life. As I have noted at various points in this paper, my work at AYA marked the beginning of the circle that I will complete upon finishing graduate school. This is the program that first got me thinking of making a career of working as an agent of personal change. Being able to go through the solo experience at this time allowed me the time to reflect on what was actually occurring. Although I wasn’t sure of the exact significance of this event, I felt that some sort of big change was taking place at the time.
2. In the first chapter, I had hypothesized that extreme introverts could benefit from the solo more than complete extraverts. This topic was not significantly addressed in this thesis. Part of the reasoning behind this is the fact that in order to give an appropriate amount of attention to this hypothesis, I would have needed to study numerous subjects. Considering the fact that I was the only subject of my own study, it would be unfair for me to state that I have or have not proved this theory to be true. I have no other subject whose experiences I can compare to my own.

Instead of focusing on the introversion/extraversion scale, I have hopefully determined that the fact that some people can benefit from the solo experience more than others has to do with the mindset of the participating individual. For instance, someone who places faith in the idea of the solo is likely to gain more from the experience than someone who does not believe that it is worth the investment of time and effort.

3. I feel that the efforts which I put forth for both of my solos contributed to my personal definition of a “successful” or “optimal” solo experience insofar as I have learned a great deal about myself through allowing myself to reflect and be.

4. Although I have provided some evidence supporting the use of choice theory for wilderness therapy through the literature review chapter, my personal study included only me as a subject. As a result, I could not begin to say that I have provided evidence for the effectiveness of choice theory applied to wilderness therapy programs for at-risk adolescents.

One conclusion that I reached after reviewing my journal was more along the lines of transpersonal theory. In both the data and literature review chapters I
have mentioned the shapes suggested by Jung’s (1964) all inclusive circular mandala as well as Joplin’s (1981) spiral. Upon reviewing my journal and seeing that I was able to somewhat bring together these two very different theorists, I recalled that Jung’s (1985) theory of human development can also be seen as resembling a spiral in the sense that the ego separates in the stages of childhood and adolescence before the process of individuation (in which all parts of the self are brought back together) occurs during the second half of life. Perhaps, then, it makes sense that three of the age groups who are thought to be able to benefit the most from the solo are adolescence, the middle aged population, and the elderly. Each of these groups goes through some major transitioning as far as development is concerned.

Transpersonal theory is applicable to the solo and wilderness therapy in general in the sense that the wilderness provides an ideal setting for going beyond the person (a literal definition of transpersonal). I think that this is best explained by Knapp and Smith (2005), who I quoted earlier on. My journal entries have provided evidence of my having gone outside in order to get inside of myself.

Further Analysis

I have mentioned in various parts of this thesis that this study is different than most forms of research in the sense that it is more subjective than objective. I again remind the reader that this seems quite appropriate to me since part of my idea behind the mindset of an individual being the main determinant of a solo’s outcome is the thought that the outcome of the same experience can be completely different from one individual to another. The research reviewed in the
second chapter has indicated that the solo is an area that is more likely to be clearly understood through the rigors of qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) research, mainly for this reason.

In this section, I have reviewed my journal entries and the notes for particular themes that I had listed within the margins. The overall theme of the mindset as the main indicator of the outcome of the solo for a given individual remains prominent. The first theme that I delve into is the idea that the wilderness setting works as a source of therapeutic value due to the fact that it presents an experience which is novel. The second area that I reflect on is that of the importance of taking the time to step back and process our lives.

**Novelty and Risk of the Experience**

Much of the literature points to the suggestion that wilderness/adventure therapy works well because it presents clients with experiences which are novel. The experiences are meant to be new and exciting, taking the participants out of their comfort zones.

Where does this leave me? Having worked as a guide/field staff for two such programs, one might reasonably believe that this type of experiential education holds no more lessons to teach me. In part, this is why I forced myself to be challenged more during the recent solo than I had been during my training for AYA in 2002. The intense fasting, winter weather, extended length, as well as not having anyone else nearby in case of an emergency were all factors imposed to add a sense of challenge, risk, and uncertainty to the adventure.

Martin and Priest (1986) explained how safe levels of perceived risk in a novel environment can contribute to experiential learning and alleviate boredom.
in their model of the adventure experience paradigm: "In this model, the interaction of risk and competence creates the challenge. Challenge cannot exist without both situational risk and personal competence engaged in an effort to resolve uncertainty" (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 49). In the conclusion to Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude, Keith King (2005) refers to risk when he states that "There are some unique things that happen during a solo. Some of these things are risky, some are not, but isn't all learning somewhat risky?" (p. 317).

By the same token, a person completely inexperienced in the outdoors who has never been camping before in his/her life would surely be foolhardy to have gone out and done what I did without a "buddy" nearby in the event that things went awry. Complete incompetence fails to result in a learning experience and instead leaves the participant subject to potential danger, misadventure, and devastation (Priest & Baillie, 1987).

Seeing as I am fairly comfortable with the wilderness environment, I chose to face risks that were slightly less perceived and more real. I knew that these risks were somewhat safe for me because I have spent time alone in the outdoors in the past without any problems. Before my recent solo, however, I had not previously spent time alone for a period of days without food. This trip was also the only time during which I have slept alone in a quinze as my shelter. Prior to my solo in 2002, I had been challenged physically during the training for my job at AYA through fasting while backpacking for miles. Part of the challenge for me on the recent solo was trying to avoid doing physical activities. I find myself to be a fairly energetic person who is capable of keeping busy and active, so sitting
still and meditating for extended periods of time proved to be (and still proves to be) a rather difficult task for me to accomplish. There is certainly a clear theme of “being versus doing” that runs through the pages of my journal entries.

**Time to Process**

As I continued my analysis of the journal entries, I was able to pick up on the theme of “being versus doing” enacted by remaining in a single place versus always being concerned about seeking what’s next. I think that it is fair to say that my thoughts about this in relationship to the solo are applicable on a grander scale to my entire life. Maybe the fact it is so difficult for me to stay still and meditate stems from our fast-paced culture.

My biggest fear is that not taking the time to properly process things in my life could result in what Karen Horney (1950) describes as a large gap between my actual and perceived selves. After I had the rather disturbing dream about the young man who resembled my father, I commented in my journal that I didn’t understand what kind of “lies” my dream had been compensating for. To Jung (1968), a primary function of the unconscious is the compensatory one where part of the role of dreaming is trying to make up for the lies that we tell ourselves and others during the day. Reflecting on my dream in my journal, I asked, “What could I be doing wrong?” Perhaps this dream was so disturbing because my solo allowed my actual self to reveal itself more than I normally would allow. At one point in my journal, I mentioned that I didn’t think that I am guilty of trying to hide my true self through social interactions with others. While I may not be on the extreme extrovert end of the scale, I now realize that at times I am too busy spending time relating to or worrying about others to allow my “shadow” (Jung,
1964) to be addressed. This is the area of my self that was addressed in my dream.

It is also worthwhile mentioning that when the young man in the dream cried out, “You don’t understand what I went through with my mom,” it was my dad not necessarily speaking about his mother as mine. Dreams can be confusing, and certainly do not really mean what they appear to be on the surface. On the other hand, dreams can create a pathway that allows us to take a closer look at the contents of our unconscious minds. According to Jung (1968), “When you analyse dreams or symptoms or fantasies of neurotic or normal people, you begin to penetrate the unconscious mind, and you can abolish its artificial threshold” (p. 48).

When I set out on my excursion into the White Mountains, I had initially considered the possibility of extending my solo to include an additional night. This would have brought my trip to a total of about 72 hours. In my journal from the trip, I said that I felt that the incredibly powerful dream about the young man representing my father marked a climax which indicated that I had already taken all that there was to be learned from this solo. Upon returning to civilization, I began to consider the idea that I had perhaps unconsciously decided to conclude my foray into the woods when I did out of fear of having another dream of similar magnitude. Did my mindset encourage me to run away from my fears? Perhaps I now have a greater amount of empathy towards the adolescents who break their solos in programs out of fear. My guess is that their fears are more likely to be of themselves than of the wilderness setting. Nevertheless, it is the wilderness setting and the mindset that results from the exclusion of the manmade world
that can make the solo such a powerful experience through taking time to look at ourselves and process who we are and what we do.

**Conclusion and Potential Future Studies**

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed at length the therapeutic application of the solo to at-risk adolescents who are participating in wilderness programs. I have also suggested the application of the solo as a tool for people who are either middle-aged, elderly, or simply going through a major period of transition in their lives. All of the data used in this thesis comes from my own personal experiences and knowledge of the solo, from the points of view of having been both an observer and participant. I have discussed the differences between my two defined solo experiences and concluded that the most relevant factor in the outcome of a solo experience is that of the mindset of the participant. I have also mentioned that this data is fully subjective, and I should add that this conclusion, while valid, is certainly a subjective opinion that is believed to be based upon substantial evidence. Having said this, it is certainly possible that there is some confounding variable that I have failed to consider which impacts the outcome of the solo more than the mindset of the individual.

Some future questions that I have thought of include “For what populations would a wilderness solo not be appropriate?” This question refers to a matter of safety. For example, it would not be safe for someone who has been experiencing suicidal ideations to go on a wilderness solo. Asking this question, however, brought up some ideas of another population. What about those affected by a severe chronic mental illness/personality disorder such as schizophrenia who are not suicidal? The average person may think that an
intense experience such as a solo would prove too intense for someone prone to psychotic episodes. I am willing to suggest that maybe this isn't the case. It would be interesting to try and find out if, given the opportunity to freely be themselves while on a solo, the psychotic individual would have an opportunity to work through that which ails him/her. I am not quite sure how it would be possible to organize a study that would observe the results of such an experience, but I would theorize that the results could open the doors to a new form of treatment for those afflicted by the most serious disorders.

This exploration of the solo has shown the power that the experience can have if the participant allows herself/himself to make the most of it. The literature suggests that this person will benefit from the experience even more if s/he has a guide who can frame, frontload, and debrief the experience for him/her. In conclusion, this thesis has taught me a lot not only about the solo, but in turn, about myself.
LIST OF REFERENCES:


