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**SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE:
A STUDY OF FEMALE ADOLESCENTS**

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Voluntary therapeutic adventure programs for troubled youth have been provided under the principle that "challenge by choice" (Gillis & Simpson, 1994; Rhonke, 1989) facilitates a sense of self-control (Kiewa, 1994), a catalyst for therapeutic change. Such experiences are self-determined, in that they are engaged in by the individual acting as a causal agent (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Through the experience of self-determined adventure activities that promote emotional growth and positive social behavior, and through purposive processing of these experiences, adolescents are empowered by feelings of control and motivation (Autry, 2001). There is, however, a paucity of therapeutic adventure literature within the conceptual framework of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Wehmeyer, 1995). The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the self-determination characteristics of at-risk adolescents entering a therapeutic wilderness program and to determine the effect of the program on participants' self-determination.

A pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design was used to measure self-determination characteristics of at-risk female adolescents participating in a 20-day therapeutic Outward Bound wilderness program, and to assess pre-program expectations and post-program experiences of the wilderness course. The pre-test instrument contained a motivation for treatment questionnaire adapted from Ryan, Plant, and O'Malley (1995), which measured four motivation types on a Likert-type scale: internal, external, confidence in treatment, and help-seeking motivation. Two additional measures were employed to assess psychological empowerment (PE) and self-realization (SR), characteristics of self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, 1995). The questionnaire included open-ended items regarding motivation for the program and expectations of the program. The post-test included the psychological empowerment and self-realization sections from the pre-test as well as open-ended items regarding participant experiences of the wilderness program. Descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and Pearson's correlations were used to analyze the quantitative data. Content analysis was used to analyze open-ended responses.

Results indicated that participants entered the program with substantial motivation for change, as demonstrated in both the qualitative and quantitative data. Motivation appeared to be highly internal, indicating overall self-determination for participation in the program. Data were also collected to gain evidence of any treatment effect on self-determination. Mean increases were found in self-determination characteristics, though only self-realization was significant. Overall gains in self-determination characteristics are supported by the qualitative data. Negative associations between internal motivation and PE/SR change suggested that participants with high levels of self-determination at the start of the program had little room for change. Conversely, a positive association between external motivation and PE/SR change demonstrated substantive increase in self-determination characteristics by highly externally motivated participants. Prior adventure-education research has demonstrated similar gains among under-motivated clientele

(Cason & Gillis, 1994; Davis-Berman & Berman, 1989, 1999). Therapeutic adventure may, therefore, be a catalyst for increasing self-determination, regardless of the presence of external motivation. Future research might investigate whether program outcomes are dependent on internal versus external motivation for treatment. This, in turn, could have implications for how participants are recruited to programs. In addition, research could identify specific program traits that influence self-determination characteristics. Such research could inform the field as to which program traits to emphasize in order to have positive impacts on participants' self-determination.

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