

Adventure-Based Psychotherapy's Journey Toward Adulthood

By Tiffany Wynn

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Sandra Newes and Scott Bandoroff (2004) developed the beginning of an outline about the transition out of childhood that has been experienced by adventure-based psychotherapy. This tumultuous process has led to introspection, a process most individuals go through as they begin their journey toward adulthood. Within this process, some (Gillis, 2005) have asked what others are willing to do to promote and support the development of the field. In 2006, I was curious as to how, where and for whom this adventure-based psychotherapy is utilized. The project sought to identify commonalities among programs and providers that might support unification within the field, thereby encouraging programs to leave adolescence and move into adulthood; continuing the development as Newes and Bandoroff have suggested.

The results presented below were generated through a mixed methods study. The study included 14 programs (N=14) located across the United States. These programs participated in a paper survey, and additionally, 10% were selected at random for phone interviews regarding the underlying therapy of their practices, the interventions that they use, the populations that they serve, and the expected outcomes of their programs. Please see the results below.

Neill's Typology of Practice	Neill's Definition of Typology
Therapy + Adventure	Adventure Therapy (AT) Neill 2004 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Broad term for the intentional use of a combination of adventurous activities (commonly, for example, expeditions, ropes courses and initiative tasks) and facilitation to achieve psychotherapeutic goals.- Often conducted in groups- Can be used as primary or adjunctive treatment for psychological and behavioral problems.- Adventure Based Therapy-Therapeutic Adventure
Therapy + Outdoor / Wilderness	Wilderness Therapy (WT) Neill 2004 <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Emphasis on the outdoors, however the term "wilderness" specifically refers to the effort to situate the experiences in relatively natural environments.- WT tends to place more emphasis on the direct therapeutic role of nature, as well as the situational contingencies associated with living in wilderness settings.- Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare- Therapeutic Outdoor Programs

Therapy + Activity / Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity Based Psychotherapy - Diversional Therapy - Therapeutic Recreation
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James Neill's Semantic Contribution to Typology as presented by Lee Gillis (2005).

Analysis of Definition and its Relationship to Theory, Intervention, Population and Outcome

Commonalities

Commonalities were found across the board of program definitions as listed by Neill. The first section of this analysis is dedicated to these consistencies. The rest of this analysis will identify specific differences found among the types; Therapy + Adventure, Therapy + Wilderness / Outdoors and Therapy + Activity / Recreation.

Among all types of programs, there were two common interventions: assessment and treatment planning and interviewing techniques. This demonstrates that the participating programs are moving toward a more traditionally recognized therapeutic process. Research participants indicated that they are structuring their interventions through a treatment plan and allowing the therapeutic process to be directed by more traditional interviewing techniques.

These programs also expressed the following common theories and philosophies: group psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral theory, solution focused, and eclectic. There were no common populations served among the three types, however, similarities in expected outcomes were present. All types of programs expected improved family relationships, specific skills development, and a heightened self-awareness among participants.

Unique Traits

Commonalities in theory, intervention, population and outcome were addressed above. In the following paragraphs, the researcher will identify theory, intervention, population and outcome as they relate to specific types.

Therapy + Adventure (AT) will be looked at first. In the category of theory and philosophy, there were no differences. However, there were the following differences in intervention: teachable moments, unconditional positive regard, social skills training, deep empathy, positive and negative consequences and framing. These techniques seem reasonable for the activities that Neill discusses should take place in AT programs.

Those programs that claimed to provide AT services gave the most specific identification of population served. Furthermore, participants in this type were the only programs clearly identifying mental health diagnoses. The surveyed AT programs reported treatment of male or female clients, ranging in age from 4 years through adulthood. Specific disorders that were reported were; ADHD, Aspergers, learning disabilities, sex offenders and sexually reactive youth. One program identified that they treat a range of mental health issues but did not offer specific diagnoses. Not only did these programs identify with the outcomes mentioned above, they also reported improved decision making skills, self-confidence and mental health. Please see figure

4.6 below for a visual representation of this analysis.

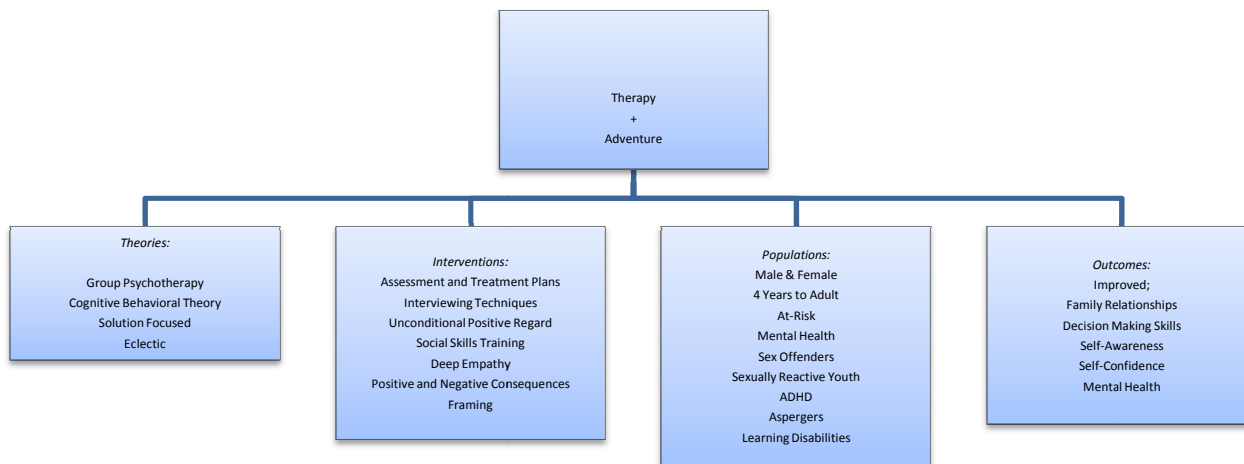


Figure 4.6 Breakdown of Results Specifically in Regard to Therapy + Adventure

The second typology to be analyzed is Therapy + Wilderness / Outdoors (WT). In the category of theory and philosophy, the aforementioned commonalities also exist, as well as family therapy and person centered theory. The researcher found it interesting that family therapy fell into WT instead of AT. In the category of interventions used in WT, the following were identified: wilderness expedition, teachable moments and wilderness as therapeutic experience. These data seemed realistic and in the correct place with WT. The population identified for this type was male and female, 10 years to 21 years, and the outcomes reported were: improved decision making skills and self-confidence. Please see Figure 4.7 below for a visual representation of this data.

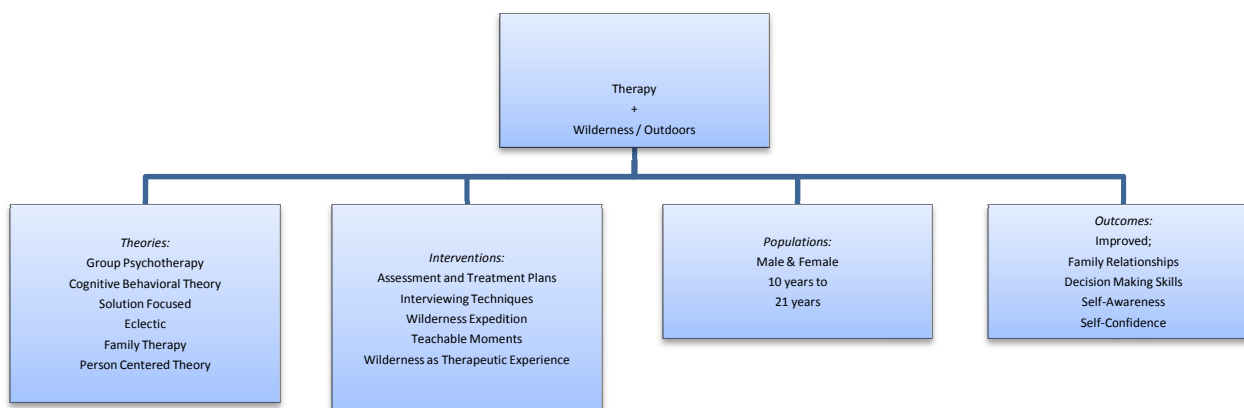


Figure 4.7 Breakdown of Results Specifically in Regard to Therapy + Wilderness/ Outdoors

The last program type to be analyzed is Therapy + Activity / Recreation. These surveyed programs stated that the interventions they use are initiative activities and social skills training. In addition, the only differing theory that was identified was harm reduction. The population receiving these services was broader in spectrum than AT or WT. Programs stated that they served the following groups: schools, churches, community organizations, camps, youth at-risk, mental health, adults in recovery, behavioral health, addictions and psychiatry. The only differing outcome was improved mental health. Please refer to figure 4.8 for a pictorial representation of these results.

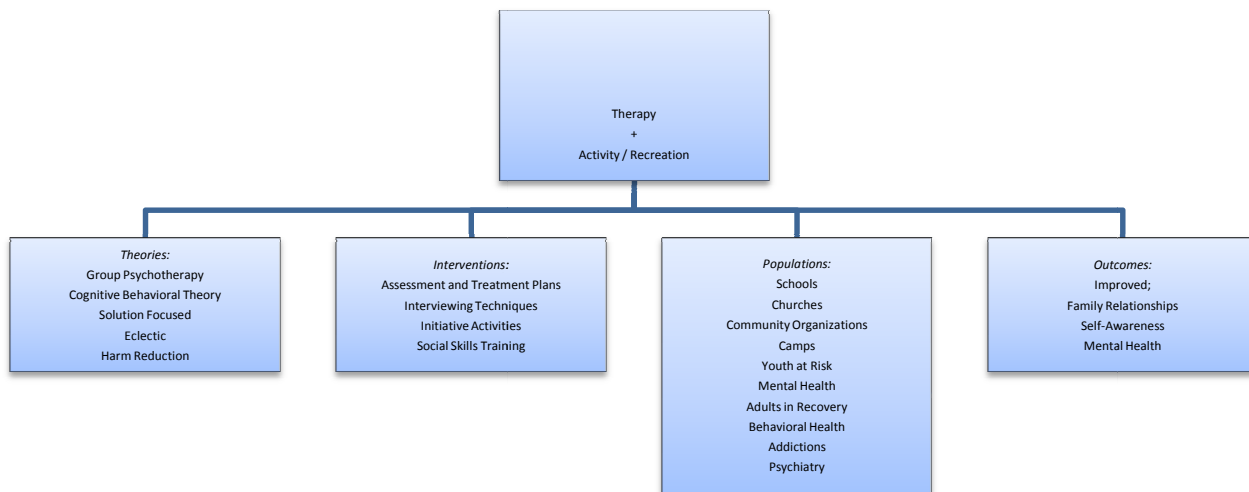


Figure 4.8 *Breakdown of Results Specifically in Regard to Therapy + Activity/ Recreation*

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