

Abilene Christian University

Digital Commons @ ACU

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

Summer 8-2018

## Adventure-Based Therapy: Couple Intimacy with Christian Spirituality

Edward Boyer  
erb95j@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Boyer, Edward, "Adventure-Based Therapy: Couple Intimacy with Christian Spirituality" (2018). Digital Commons @ ACU, *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 111.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

## ABSTRACT

Adventure-Based Therapy (ABT) models have been used for many years in the United States and beyond, primarily in adolescent and young adult populations. This project seeks to explore the experiences of couples on an ABT trip. Couples were asked to share their lived experiences as it pertains to marital intimacy, nature, and Christian spirituality. Seven themes emerged as the interviews were transcribed and confirmed by the couples: appreciation for nature, building community, care shown by partner, connecting with God outdoors, leaving technology, preparation together, and shared activity. These themes form the backbone of potential new outcomes as couples' work is explored in the backcountry. This thesis concludes by exploring potential areas for future research.

Adventure-Based Therapy: Couple Intimacy with Christian Spirituality

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Marriage and Family Studies

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfilment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy


By

Edward R. Boyer

August 2018

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy

  
Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

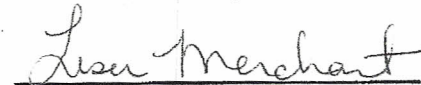
Date

8-10-18

Thesis Committee



Dr. Dale Bertram, Chair



Dr. Lisa Merchant



Dr. Lisa Powell

Dedicated to my wonderful wife with whom I love to adventure and who has stood by me throughout this journey, and to my wonderful friends who continue to motivate me to share my enthusiasm of the mountains as well as personal and relational wholeness. The journey is the destination.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge our wonderful MMFT professors, Dr. Dale Bertram, Dr. Lisa Merchant, Dr. Lisa Powell, and Dr. Wayne Perry, who all pushed me to research in a field that I was passionate about. Without your encouragement, I would have never attempted this project or succeeded in finishing.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	iii
I. INTRODUCTION OF ADVENTURE-BASED THERAPY.....	1
Overview and Definitions .....	1
Statement of Problem.....	2
Research Questions .....	2
Rationale of Research .....	3
II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE .....	4
Adventure-Based Therapy and Its Many Names .....	4
Key Areas of ABT Treatment.....	5
Couple Intimacy .....	7
Spirituality in Therapy .....	8
Nature: Eco Wellness.....	9
Gaps in Research.....	10
III. FRAMEWORK OF MODEL AND METHODOLOGY .....	13
Phenomenology.....	13
Participants.....	13
Data Collection .....	14
IV. PRESENTATION OF DATA .....	16
Results.....	16
Demographics .....	17

Themes .....	17
Appreciation for Nature .....	18
Building Community .....	18
Care Shown by Partner .....	19
Connecting with God in Nature .....	20
Disconnecting from Technology.....	20
Preparation Together.....	21
Shared Activity .....	22
Conclusion .....	25
V. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION .....	26
Discussion.....	26
Marital Intimacy.....	27
Christian Spirituality.....	27
Limitation of Study.....	29
Future Research Implications .....	29
Conclusion .....	30
REFERENCES .....	32
APPENDIX A: IRB Approval .....	37
APPENDIX B: Informed Consent.....	38



## LIST OF TABLES

1. Participant Demographics.....	17
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION OF ADVENTURE-BASED THERAPY

**Overview & Definitions**

John Muir once wrote, “In God’s wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and wounds heal ere we are aware” (as cited in Wolfe, 1979, p. 317). There are many names by which outdoor experiential therapy is known: Adventure-Based Counseling (ABC), Wilderness Therapy (WT), and Wilderness Adventure Therapy (WAT), Outdoor-Based Therapy (OBT). Each has a slightly different theoretical foundation, but all share therapeutic approaches based in the outdoors. The term *Adventure-Based Therapy* or *ABT* will be used throughout for consistency, unless a particular framework is predominantly found in only one of the modalities.

Many of these therapies are residential treatment programs of various lengths with differing requirements and experiences. WAT is based on principles of systemic framework and paradigm, clinical psychology, and group therapy (Bowen, Neill, & Crisp, 2016). WT emerged as a program for at-risk adolescents and uses traditional counseling techniques in wilderness activities (Hill, 2007). ABC finds its roots in systemic family theories such as Strategic, Structural, and Bowenian therapies (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). While each of these ABTs are grounded in systemic theories, little research has been done on Christian spirituality as a component of Adventure-Based

Therapy. Additionally, relatively little research in ABTs involves couples, with most research instead focusing on adolescents.

The purpose of this research is to explore the therapeutic impact of Christian spirituality on couple connectedness in an Adventure-Based Therapy. While considerable time has been spent studying specific forms of this modality, especially mental health issues associated with adolescents, few have studied the impact of spirituality in this form of therapy. Additionally, few resources are available for the impact of Adventure-Based Therapy in adult populations. According to Heintzman (2010), while there are many studies of Wilderness Therapy groups, few have been studies with spirituality.

### **Statement of Problem**

While there are numerous resources reviewing ABTs in various degrees, most review adolescent programs. In their research, Daniel, Bobilya, Kalisch, and McAvoy (2014) have shown gaps in instructor/group interaction, timing, length, and other areas currently untouched in research. Seemingly other areas to study include adult programming, marital programming, family programming, and spirituality. For some couples, sitting in a therapy office with a counselor may not suffice; instead, they may need something a little less conventional. What is the experience of a couple spending time in nature in terms of spirituality and couple intimacy?

### **Research Questions**

While much has been studied in the way of ABT with adolescent and young adult populations, little has been reviewed for adults or married couples. Married couples on an ABT program may have experiences that have not yet been identified in the literature. This research will focus in on married couples lived experiences while on an ABT

program. The primary question for this research is: What is the lived experience of a couple on a Christian-based outdoor adventure trip? Three secondary questions exist: (1) How does ABT impact marital relationships? (2) How was relationship intimacy affected during the ABT experience? (3) How did the element of Christian spirituality impact feelings of connectedness during the ABT experience?

### **Rationale of Research**

In ABT research articles, there is an emphasis on the outdoor lived experience of adolescents (Bettmann, Tucker, Behrens, & Vanderloo, 2016; Bowen et al., 2016; Daniel et al., 2014). Much of this research has been directed toward groups like Outward Bound and National Outdoor Leadership Schools (Bobilya, Kalisch, & Daniel, 2014; Daniel et al., 2014; Goldenberg, & Pronsolino, 2008; Kelly, 2006). There is also a multitude of research surrounding spirituality and faith in counseling and therapy (Bauman, 1998; Carlson, McGeorge, & Toomey, 2014; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992). However, exploring the intersection of ABT and Christian spirituality and its impact on couples is the direction of this research. With many people recognizing their need to unplug and return to outdoor activities such as hiking, adventuring, and backpacking, what could be the impact of programming offered outside of the therapy room? Are we able to treat the whole person while sitting still inside? What role does shared experience play in connecting couples to each other? Each of these questions may be explored while researching couples participating in ABTs.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### **Adventure-Based Therapy and Its Many Names**

Adventure-Based Therapies (ABTs) can likely be traced back to wilderness therapy programming with adolescents in the 1920s according to Margalit and Ben-Ari (2014). These programs were designed to change maladaptive behaviors through experiential learning in the outdoors. Fletcher and Hinkle (2002) attribute the conception of Adventure Based Counseling (ABC) to Hahn in the 1980s and state that there are two different elements at work: soft skills (counseling skills) and hard skills (outdoor activities). Often these therapy models are used with adolescents who are resistant to traditional counseling options (Tucker, Javorski, Tracy, & Beale, 2013). Additionally, some found that the wilderness context dissolved the stigma often attached to traditional counseling (Fernee, Gabrielsen, Andersen, & Mesel, 2017).

ABT can trace its success to the belief that clients may have a tendency to disclose more in environments outside of the therapy office (Hill, 2007). Fernee et al. (2017) further explain the interconnectedness of individuals to their external world that may govern their lives socio-culturally. Taking the client outside of their “regular” world pulls them out of the social rut they may be in, and into a new external reality. ABT attempts to engage the client actively rather than passively in the process of change (Tucker et al., 2013). Sundaram (2014), in an article on nature and counseling says,

“Using a mindfulness based conceptualization, nature nudges towards the present moment where senses awaken, where the brain and the mind can relax and where we can reconnect with the wisdom of our bodies” (pp. 52-53). Other major therapeutic components play a factor as well, such as group dynamics, empathetic leaders, and mindfulness exercises.

Structurally, ABTs are based in group therapy dynamics and its many characteristics. In her work in Wilderness Therapy (WT), Kelly said, “Adventure therapy has been generically defined as a class of change-oriented, group-based experiential learning processes that occur in the context of a contractual, empowering, and empathic professional relationship” (2006, p. 99). The group-based element utilizes the interaction of the individuals and the experiences created to cultivate a rich counseling experience. Although research has shown the evidence of the appropriateness for many types of group therapy, in ABT there is little consensus as to about the reasons seen for improvement and therefore evaluation information is limited (Yalom & Leszcz, 2008). There are many groups that have benefited from ABT, such as troubled adolescents, late adolescents, and families, but what is lacking in the literature is the impact on couples.

### **Key Areas of ABT Treatment**

There are many different areas that ABTs seek to address including depression, stress, anxiety, substance abuse, self-efficacy, trauma, and self-esteem (Bettman et al., 2016; Bowen et al., 2016; Fernee et al., 2017; Hill, 2007; Mutz & Müller, 2016).

Bowen’s research has shown that even three months after ABTs, the clients retained significant improvement in depressive symptomology (Bowen et al., 2016). Programs of this nature often increase intensity on the trail, attempting to replace the common

stressors that may cause depression, negative emotions, or poor well-being (Mutz & Müller, 2016). Bird (2015) has shown that stress levels were significantly lower following an ABT, as well as after a two-month follow-up. Along with depression, anxiety is another area that ABT programs seek to address. In a study by Bettman et al. (2017), participants found to hold less resentment and anxiousness toward parental units was positively related to how close they were with others and had decreased anxiety and fear of abandonment.

Substance abuse is another issue addressed in many ABT programs (Hill, 2007). Just as the success of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has shown us spirituality is an important aspect in recovery, with negative spirituality raising feelings of depression, low self-esteem, and defensiveness (Katsogianni & Kleftras, 2015). Participants in ABTs often gain an increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy as defined by Fernee et al. (2017) as a feeling of faith in one's own ability to overcome obstacles in life. With this rise in self-efficacy participants may experience something that previously was considered difficult to now be accomplished successfully (Mutz & Müller, 2016). Victims of abuse may also find great self-confidence and self-efficacy after the completion of a program when linked to other modalities of counseling (Kelly, 2006). Outward Bound requires additional individual or group counseling before its WT programming for victims of abuse (Kelly, 2006). Each of these resources are helpful with the individual population, but still there is little research to be done on the effect of ABT with couple intimacy because of the apparent lack of programming.

## **Couple Intimacy**

Intimacy is a word for which many people think they know the definition, but people rarely know a technical definition. Many words get tangled in the definition of intimacy such as love, friendship, connectedness, closeness. Sternberg defines *intimacy* as, “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships. It thus includes within its purview those feelings that give rise, essentially, to the experience of warmth in a loving relationship” (Sternberg, 2017, Triangular Theory of Love section, para. 2). The feeling of closeness or connectedness is a hallmark of a good marital relationship. Tani, Pascuzzi and Raffagnino (2015) in their study of intimacy used the Couple’s Affectivity Scale (CAS) which looks at self-disclosure, partner disclosure, perceived partner responsiveness, relational communication, physical attraction, and sexual satisfaction to determine couple intimacy.

Humans long for a sense of community and belonging in which vulnerability is both encouraged and safe. Adler believed that individuals yearn for this connectedness in what he termed “Gemeinschaftsgefühl” (Reese & Myers, 2014, p. 401). Connectedness and commitment may increase couple intimacy and, according to Brittle (2014), more satisfying sex. For some couples, intimacy may actually trump intercourse. Intimacy then has the potential to take a place of great importance in marital relationships. During some stages of transition and marital adjustment, intimacy is greatly enhanced by a couple’s ability to communicate their own emotions (Tani et al., 2015). Intimacy plays a vital role in the marital satisfaction of both partners in emotional and physical dimensions. While Bauman (1998) stated, “Clinebell and Clinebell posited that intimacy consists of several



dimensions, one of which they term spiritual intimacy” connecting intimacy with a couple’s spirituality (p. 134).

### **Spirituality in Therapy**

Spirituality in therapy is an area that has a renewed interest over the last few years. In fact, many have surmised that spirituality cannot be removed from the other elements of therapy if we are to treat the whole person. Various scholars have posited that spirituality is the core of wellness and inseparable from other aspects of wellness (Cashwell, Bentley, & Bigbee, 2007). Cashwell et. al (2007) also point out, “Acknowledging the spiritual nature of counseling involves first recognizing the counseling setting and time as sacred space” (p. 69). This acknowledgement recognizes the setting as a sacred place, which is particularly important to ABTs. Walsh (2009) wrote that spirituality may be manifested in people and cultures in many differing ways because of its nature to be “hidden in all people’s hearts, secretly influencing their lives” (p. 127). People are generally unaware as to the depths of the roots that one’s own spirituality may hold in how they perceive the world. Spirituality was placed at the core of Alfred Adler’s “Wheel of Wellness” (Reese & Myers, 2012). This “Wheel of Wellness” includes five life tasks, “Spirituality (depicted as the core or central aspect of wellness), self-direction, love, friendship, and work” (as cited in Reese & Myers, 2012, p. 400).

But for many, spirituality is particularly difficult to conceptualize and put into a formalized definition. Christian spirituality as expressed in the current movement of openness by researchers also gives room for exploration by program designers in ABTs to more give more explicit attention to the spiritual components of their operation

(Hitzhusen, 2004). In many ways spirituality has been largely disregarded until more recently in many mental health fields (Harris, Randolph, & Gordon, 2016). A call to integration of several of the other dimensions of therapy along with spirituality warrants further exploration. Reese and Myer (2012) specifically name a connection to nature and spirituality as key components to for discussing wholeness in therapeutic realms. The connection to nature is deeply spiritual in and of itself.

### **Nature: Eco-Wellness**

An emerging area of eco-wellness has begun to crop up in the literature surrounding ABTs. Reese and Myers (2012) in their work on wellness, eco-wellness, and spirituality state, “We introduce and define Eco-Wellness as a sense of appreciation, respect for, and awe of nature that results in feelings of connectedness with the natural environment and the enhancement of holistic wellness” (p. 400). The idea that a connectedness to the natural environment as method of healing or wellness isn't new. But one can't help to wonder what the long-term effects of the urbanization of America has on its mental health state. Eco-wellness is call back to nature to enhance one's mental health.

Many people in today's mental health fields have begun to recognize the need for nature in a client's life, a way toward identity, or a move toward his or her core self. Nature has a unique way of centering someone, as they deeply breathe in the air, listen to the birds or other natural sounds, and even move freely throughout the experience. Sundaram (2014) speaks of how this state of mindfulness might allow someone to be more present in that moment because of the way the mind takes a posture of relaxation in nature and “can reconnect with the wisdom of our bodies” (p. 53). Could this be what many men in the south and rural areas feel when they are out hunting? Could this be the

draw to the numbers of millennials drawn to eco-travel and photography? Sundaram (2014) described this “draw” in terms of how long humans historically have spent their time indoors versus outdoors, “A pioneer in the field of Forest therapy, Miyazaki states that for 99.9 % of our evolutionary history as humans we have lived in nature, therefore we have only lived 0.1% in cities and have not yet adapted, the result is stress” (p. 54).

Nature reaches and touches a part of an individual that may not be identifiable to the casual observer. Many people escape to beaches or mountains for vacations, in order to get away and find rest and renewal. This taste of nature acts as a healing process even if it is short lived. Some have pointed to the relationship between nature and overall wellness, and when we regularly spend time in nature there is also a component of self-identity attributed to the comfort level found in that space (Reese, Lewis, Myers, Wahesh, & Iverson, 2014). While many have found a connection between nature and wellness, few if any therapy models that have accounted for the effects or tried to explore these effects with multiple different populations (Reese & Myers, 2012).

### **Gaps in Research**

The number of studies on ABT have increased in the last 20 years, yet numerous gaps still are present in the current literature. According to Daniel et al. (2014), gaps in the literature include: instructor/group interaction, risk-growth relationship, timing, length, student relationships, role of larger community, generational influence, cultural differences, and privilege. Other gap areas in research may include adult programming, marriage/relationship programs, family, and spirituality. Because of the difficulty in follow-up care, few studies exist as to the pre-experience and post-experience requirements or outcomes. In many cases, some form of follow-up-care was

recommended, and for many, after 24 months, they were still reflecting on the impact of the treatment (Ferneer et al., 2017). Larivière et al. (2012) found that twelve-month follow-up using the Youth-Outcome Questionnaire (Y-OQ) for adolescent programs, which assesses emotional and behavioral problems, showed scores were without much differentiation to scores at discharge. More follow-up studies in the sustainability of outcomes could be helpful for future research.

Spirituality as mentioned above is another major area of perceived gap in the research, both in traditional therapy and more specifically in ABTs. Spirituality is perceived to provide significant value in the therapy model but has been largely neglected according to Harris, Randolph, and Gordon (2016). Existing literature suggests that family therapy programs are not currently adequately preparing students to address these beliefs as resources for change in therapy (Carlson et al., 2014). In determining the spiritual aspect of ABT, one of the difficulties is that often growth areas are stimulated by intentional interactions and spontaneous events, making it very difficult to track (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992). According to Hientzman (2009), in a survey of American camp directors, spiritual value was attributed to a factor of spiritual health. According to Cashwell et al. (2007) there may be aspects of a counselor's life that influence the outcome as well, including: self-care, interconnectedness with clients, and clear intention of serving needs of others. Spirituality is a direct outcome goal of many outdoor programs and therefore warrants more exploratory studies.

Difficulties in the methodology for ABTs are numerous due to the nature of most of the programs being short term and not connected to the everyday lives of the participants. Thus, studies are often delivered to small heterogeneous groups, and are

rarely administered by people who are considered experts in outdoor adventure or therapy (Larivière et al., 2012). Difficulty also arises when trying to ascertain the level of comfort a participant feels in the outdoors before the experience and therefore how much influence positively or negatively this may have on their experience (Reese et al., 2014). Other factors contributing to difficulty in research include generating a control group, which can be difficult on ABT trips due to the uniqueness of each trip and the obstacles involved with replicating the ABT dynamics in another scenario (Gabrielsen, Fernee, Aasen, & Eskedal, 2016). Finally, other factors that may play a part in the methodology include the influence of each instructor, specific challenges encountered on the trip and the particular wilderness setting of the experience (Daniel, 2006).

Overall, ABT programming seems to be hard to find for adults who are older than young adult, and even fewer for couples seeking to experience it together or structured for couples. While on ABT trips with a mixture of singles and couples, the researcher saw the benefits of the couples spending time together without the distractions of their regular lives. These couples described their experience as being harmonizing, connecting, and a good experience for their marital intimacy. Each of these trips included an element of Christian spirituality, including a journal, individual quiet time, group time, and individual discussions. While literature is few and far between regarding couples in ABT situations, the researcher has seen the benefits for couples and has experienced it firsthand.

## CHAPTER III

### FRAMWORK OF MODEL AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research is primarily focused on the lived experience of the individual or couple (Creswell, 2009). The concern according to Moustakas (1994) is not in the explanation or analysis, but in experience itself. Thus, the methodology for this project was simplistic with only a few broad questions about the experience in order to gain a picture of the lived experience from the participant. The participant sample was taken from couples who have experienced an outdoor adventure with a spiritual focus. Couples involved in an adventure-based trip in the last three years were asked to explore their lived experience as a couple during and after one of these trips. Each couple are married with a Christian faith worldview and were willing to be interviewed over VSEE, an online streaming telemedicine platform approved by HIPAA. Other background demographic information collected at the beginning of the interview included: age, ethnicity, years married, and years practicing Christianity.

#### **Participants**

Phenomenological research is rooted in asking questions from which themes and meaning units can be derived from what the individuals have experienced (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, four broad questions were asked of the participants to open dialogue reflecting upon their experience together during their experience. Participants were invited into the study via email and given the opportunity to opt out at any time.

Participants were asked for voluntary inclusion and to email the researcher directly for participation. The researcher asked volunteers if they have participated together in an ABT in the last three years, marital status, and faith background. The couples were interviewed together via VSEE, a HIPAA-approved online streaming platform, and recorded for transcription. Couples were asked about their lived experience on the adventure trip in which they participated together, the nature of the marital experience, and the spiritual effects on the marriage, as further described in the questions below. Each interview was recorded, then transcribed and coded according to the data and themes that came out of the lived experience of the couples via the interviews. Those units were then reduced to six themes, with a seventh added after feedback from participants. Seven couples were contacted for participation, with the final number of participants at five couples. Demographic information for each couple is presented in the data below (Creswell, 2009). Prospective participants who do not meet the specifications of being a married couple, of Christian faith, and participated in a wilderness program will not qualify for participation in this study and were left out of the invitation process.

### **Data Collection**

Couples willing to participate were sent an informed consent with statements that participants can end the interview at any time. Compensation was not offered to the participants so early termination from the study will not affect them. After the interview, participants were sent an email for general demographic information such as age, ethnicity, number of years married, and number of years as a practicing Christian. As is appropriate in phenomenological research, the following general questions were asked in order to draw out the perceived experience of each participant:

1. Describe to me your experiences on the adventure-based trip. What did you do, see, describe your fondest memories?
2. How did the experience affect your marital relationship?
3. What was the effect of the outdoor experiences on your couple intimacy?
4. How did the integration of Christian Spirituality affect your experience together?
5. How have you seen your marital intimacy change as result of this experience together?

Subsequent questions were used for follow-up or clarification of answers to above questions, seeking underlying meanings. Preference was given to couples participating together in the interview. Interviews spanned the time between 30 and 60 minutes.

Transcriptions of the interviews were thoroughly read several times for emerging themes, areas of inquiry, and meaning. The researcher's own reflection on the description of the experiences gives rise to find underlying meanings and give a portrayal of the phenomenon reflected. Further exploration as to the nature of the experience, qualities, qualifying phenomenon, and varying conditions was also warranted and reflected in response and follow up questions by the interviewer (Moustakas, 1994). The results of the underlying themes and what constitutes the phenomena is the focus of the synthesis of the phenomena of the experience. Results are presented in categories under phenomenological themes as drawn out of the interviews.



CHAPTER IV  
PRESENTATION OF DATA

**Results**

The interviews were held using the HIPAA-approved software VSEE in a secure room of the Marriage and Family Institute at Abilene Christian University (ACU). The interviews included five couples, each of whom had experienced an adventure-based trip together as a couple in the last three years. Once the interviews had taken place each of the five sessions were then transcribed by the researcher into a single document. This document was read through thoroughly by the researcher several times to gain the feel and perceived overarching themes of the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Notes were compiled in the margins of the document and meaning units were determined from the emerging themes of the interviews as described by Husserl's and Giorgi's views of phenomenological research (Finlay, 2013). The interviewees' lived experience on their trip as a couple was examined, listened to, and broken down into meaningful sub-units to find commonality between each of the subjects and perceived experiences. After the themes had been culled from the interviews, they were emailed to each of the couples asking for their feedback as to the accuracy of the themes and if any theme had been missed. One new theme emerged from this questioning and was confirmed after going back through the transcripts with an eye for the remarks and corresponding experience of the participants.

## Demographics

Each participant was asked to volunteer their demographic information in four areas. The four pieces of demographic material requested were: age, race, number of years married, and number of years as a Christian.

Table 1

### *Demographics of Participants*

	Age Range Male, Female	Race	Years Married Range	Years Christian Male, Female
Couple 1	25-34, 25-34	Caucasian	8-15	16-20
Couple 2	25-34, 25-34	Caucasian	8-15	6-10
Couple 3	35-44, 35-44	Caucasian	16-25	26+
Couple 4	35-44, 35-44	Caucasian	4-7	6-10, 21-25
Couple 5	35-44, 25-34	Caucasian	8-15	26+

The researcher recognizes the challenge of diversity with the five participating couples from similar backgrounds, age, and ethnicity.

## Themes

There were seven significant themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the couple on their trips, through the phenomenological process. Each of these themes seem to point to the significant nature of the trip for the couples interviewed. These themes were met with consistency throughout each of the five couples with a couple minor variances. The emerging themes were:

1. Appreciation for Nature
2. Building Community
3. Care Shown by Partner
4. Connecting with God Outdoors

5. Disconnecting Technology
6. Preparation Together
7. Shared Activity

The themes were each mentioned by at least four of the five couples in their interview by one spouse, and often confirmed by the other.

**Appreciation for Nature.** The member check email feedback loop for the most part confirmed themes compiled by the researcher. However, one of the couples inquired about a significant theme that they felt had been missed. The first theme, “Appreciation for Nature,” was the theme captured by the feedback loop with the couples. Couple one expressed that “sitting in nature together and soaking it in” was a significant aspect of their trip. The wife of couple two expressed that “the surreal beauty that surrounded us and the peace that you don’t seem to have in your daily living.” Several of the couples described having “fun in nature,” “being outside,” “natural beauty,” “sitting next to the river . . . enjoying the peace and calm,” “enjoy being outside,” “I loved being outside,” and “extremely peaceful.” Each of these descriptions points to the different ways that each of the couples gained or saw a difference in themselves when they were outdoors in nature. In some ways, they stated the restorative qualities of nature that seemed to bring peace, calm, fun, enjoyment, and beauty before them.

**Building Community.** Secondly, each of them described a sense of “building community” during the trip with the other participants. Couple one described the trip had added worth because of the other couple who was there and that they were able to feel supported, saying, “We don’t have an awful lot of couples we can spend that kind of quality time with.” This couple recalled needing more “community” and couples as

friends because of their work, which may feel isolating at times. Couple two mentioned that “being around other Christians our age” as significant to them. One couple (couple three) mentioned talking around the campfire, community built on the hike, and stopping to take breaks or eat meals together with others. Still another mentioned how nice it was to go with others and to “get to know people better . . . provides a lot of opportunities to talk.” Couple five in reflection of the trip mentioned how important it was, “To surround ourselves with the right people, the right community, people who will come along side of us.” For each of the couples there was a shared sense that the trip would not have been the same without the others on the adventure. The other people on the trip seemed to add to the experience and in some cases offered the opportunity to reflect on their own sense of felt needs for community at home.

**Care Shown by Partner.** The third theme that rose out of the interviews was “Care Shown by Partner.” A few of the participants expressed that they felt supported, knowing that their partner cares for their well-being and seeks to help them. For couple one, the wife described it as encouragement, carrying the whole tent and him thinking of her throughout the trip. The wife from couple two expressed that it was the way her spouse would get up and make oatmeal in the morning that helped her to feel cared for by her partner. For this couple, when a phone call came about a family emergency and their trip was cut short, she expressed that she felt supported as they hiked off the mountain and made a trip to the airport to take care of family. Another participant described how even going on the trip was incredible for his spouse because it was so far out of her comfort zone. He felt cared for and supported through her action of going on the trip at all. A common thread was the male taking on extra equipment and weight in his

backpack in order to make the trip more manageable for his partner. At least two of the female participants mentioned how the male partner would put up the tent on their own and the expression of care that simple act provided after a long tiring day of hiking. In each of these instances the participant described an act of care and verbalized the appreciation that accompanied the action.

**Connecting with God in Nature.** The fourth theme was “Connecting with God in Nature.” One participant described the experience, “I really connect with God, [while] moving and being outside.” Many of the participants mentioned the three-hour solo time that each participated in on the third day of the trip. Some mentioned the challenge of spending that much time alone in nature. They talked about the journaling, prayer time, reading the bible, singing/worshiping, being still, all alone but also processing the time or praying with their spouse after the solo time. For many there was an expression of discomfort with being alone in the woods or alone at all. One participant described the summit experience as, “Being on top of the summit, you know it’s almost like brining you a step closer even still. Just being able to see farther and more of His creation than you can at sea level.” One of the female described her connection with God in nature, “First of all, I loved being outdoors. I think that’s where I feel the most connected with God.” Still another participant reported, “I think I have never felt more close to God or spiritually connected to my faith than experiencing the mountains.” Most of the participants described various parts of the trip as being challenging but helping them to connect with God in ways that they don’t on a regular basis in their routine at home.

**Disconnecting from Technology.** Each couple mentioned “leaving technology behind” or “being disconnected” from technology while on the trip. For nearly every

participant this was both difficult and helpful to the experience. There are studies that are currently being conducted about the effects of technology on our society. It seems rarely do people put their phones down. One participant said, “The mountain top experience, you grow closer together because you’re away from technology in God’s creation,” referring to the impact of being disconnected from the technology. Another participant speculated, “I don’t know if this is every time, but going up a mountain and less distractions, you’re forced to focus on each other because you’re not easily distracted by other things,” hinting at the move toward intimacy. One couple in exploring how the outdoor experience affected their marriage described, “But I felt like we did connect more because there wasn’t any distractions of TV, phones, nothing like that. We were just able to experience each other in the wilderness.” For these couples, the ability to disconnect from technology seemed to open the opportunity for more connectedness to God, self, and their partner.

**Preparation Together.** The sixth theme that emerged from the research was the time in preparation together before the trip. The preparation together seemed to be separated into two different categories: physical preparation and supply preparation. One couple reported time spent together running with the wife stating, “Running together in preparation was fun . . . we hadn’t really done that before.” Another couple elaborated that the buildup to the trip gave them something to talk about, saying, “It was a long buildup of stuff that we were doing together, the planning, the preparation, and all of the physical training.” When asked how the trip affected the marital relationship, couple three responded, “I felt like it worked. I think it started even before we went on the trip, I

made the decision . . . I started preparing.” The fourth couple joked that her favorite part was the shopping beforehand with her stating how fun it was for her.

The fifth couple had the most to say about the preparation, as for them this seemed to be a formative piece of the trip. The husband described the way they researched together for equipment, went to stores together, and stated, “We actually spent a magnitude, inordinate amount of time prepping, then we did executing and actually doing it (the adventure).” Later he stated how much prepping for the trip physically became a connection point for his relationship with God. They went on to state how even now two years later they will take a running break midday when he works from home, stating, “We decided to go for a run . . . We would never have been able to do those types of things had we not done this.” The preparation helped the couples to share in time together, planning, talking, and physical activity. Couple two elaborated on the preparation and the experience as forcing them together, “It kind of forced us to be closer together. We had to work together.”

**Shared Activity.** No theme came up more in the interview process than the time that the couples spent in close proximity before, during, and after the experience or “Shared Activity.” The couples all had numerous examples about how they spent time together throughout the process of the adventure-based trip. The wife in couple one summed up right near the start of the interview, “Finding another thing that you like doing together . . . now it’s one of the things we list that we like to do together” referencing hiking. Her husband went on to express, “Anything you’re doing, you’re doing together. Everything requires two people.” When asked how their marital intimacy was affected they stated their intentionality about communicating and looking for

opportunities to spend time with each other without the kids as key for them. Couple two hinted at the different components of the shared activity together, “Then physically doing it and experiencing everything together . . . it gives us something to share together, talk about, and have memories about.”

Couple three expressed that the opportunity to share in the little things made a big difference, saying:

The common tasks are even fun. Go find firewood, or set up the tent, or go get the water . . . I would stand outside of the tent and hand her stuff . . . all of those activities . . . you have the same goals. You both have to eat, both have to sleep, drink water. Our goals are very much the same.

This statement was a small clip of a larger portion talking about how they did many activities together while on the trip. His spouse had her own picture of the shared activities lasting effect on their relationship:

Having more of a shared closeness. I knew it would be amazing for him, we had done it, we had accomplished this together. Shared experience on the trip and the fun things we had gotten to do, I think it drew us closer.

This couple was unique in that he had experienced a trip like this before, but without his spouse. Now, bringing his spouse into that experience changed it for him. He expressed it in terms of connection and trying to share past experiences with her, “I didn’t have to take my experience back and try to share it with her . . . We came back and it was, I love you, and I wish that we were on that rock beside the stream together.” For this couple, the shared experience brought back powerful imagery.



The fourth couple also had a similar experience as the husband had prior experience in the outdoors, but the wife did not. The husband said, “That type of adventure was part of my background in growing up. That was something I looked forward to sharing.” The wife went on to express her thankfulness for the shared experience together, “Still at the end of the day, I’m glad that I got to experience what (he) loves so much.” Couple number five also expressed how shared activities brought them together. For them, sharing didn’t always come naturally before the experience, “Sharing is easier for some people than others, and our marriage it is easier for half of us than the other half.” The food aspect seemed to be a point of emphasis as they had to share food throughout the trip. They also described how sharing in the summit together was memorable, as the husband stated, “I remember getting to the peak and thinking, I need to go find (her), we’re going to do this together.

This couple described how doing things together on this trip was a reminder to share in activities together for their own relationship,

That’s something that we decided is really important to us to build our relationship. We have to go out and do things together. We have to be in positions to rely on each other and then we also have to be in a position where we can recall memories where there was suffering to understand our joy.

For them, their connection and recalling of the good memories helps them to endure the harder times. Couple five along with other couples recounted putting the tent up together was particularly challenging, forcing them to communicate together each day. This couple also talked about ending the day together, “The evening, kind of lying there in the tent and just kind of recounting the day . . . was kind of fun.” The wife also recalled how

the spiritual closeness brought then shared closeness by sharing in the spiritual activities together, “But in doing that I feel closer to (him), I felt closer to (him) in that moment, on that trip.” They reported a reliance on each other physically and spiritually, as they experience the trip together to be a key in how they look back to the shared activities on the trip.

### **Conclusion**

The emerging themes resulted from the culling process of deep reading, reflection, and conceptualizing them down to more manageable parts. Themes emerged via the transcriptions of the interviews and expressed the lived experience of the participants in the adventure-based therapy experience. Each of the five couples who participated in the interview process expressed the themes presented either in covert or overt ways. The themes were then emailed back to participants asking for feedback, changes, or additions. The themes were then each presented and validated via direct quotation from the participants as they answered each of the five questions presented to them during the interview. The answers to the questions will serve to present the underlying implications on couple intimacy with spirituality on an adventure-based therapy trip.

CHAPTER V  
RESEARCH DISCUSSION

**Discussion**

The lived experience of each couple on their adventure-based therapy experience was explored through the interview process developed around the five questions:

1. Describe to me your experiences on the adventure-based trip. What did you do, see, describe your fondest memories?
2. How did the experience affect your marital relationship?
3. What was the effect of the outdoor experiences on your couple intimacy?
4. How did the integration of Christian Spirituality affect your experience together?
5. How have you seen your marital intimacy change as result of this experience together?

Each of these questions asked of the couples sought to answer the research questions: (1) How does ABT impact marital relationships? (2) How was relationship intimacy affected during the ABT experience? (3) How did the element of Christian spirituality impact feelings of connectedness during the ABT experience?

These underlying research questions served to give a basis of inquiry into the effect of the ABT on the marital relationship, the impact on intimacy, and the effect of Christian spirituality on the experience. While each of the couples described different experiences on the trip, the similarities between each of the participants was mentionable.

Each of the couples had a fair amount of very positive memories associated with the trip, which they were reticent to share. The experience of the ABT trip seemed to be significant on each couple. While one couple (couple four) did not describe direct ways in which their marriage was positively affected, each of the others had direct ways of describing the importance of the trip on their relationship.

### **Marital Intimacy**

Relational intimacy was a running theme throughout the interview process. Many of the couples expressed the unexpected joy in spending time together preparing physically for the trip or spending time shopping in preparation. Couples also expressed the care shown by their partner was an expression of closeness and thoughtfulness. Some of the female partners discussed going on the trip because of the experience with their partner or because the outdoors was so important to the partner, showing care and interest in the partners world. One couple (couple five) even described the intimacy gained through conflict on the trip, “I think that I’m now more willing to ‘trek’ through conflict and confrontation . . . Those difficult conversations that we have to have.” Couples’ ability to cope through conflict has been shown to raise couple intimacy (Schnarch, 1991).

### **Christian Spirituality**

Christian spirituality seemed to be an important component of the experience for each of the participating couples. There was a strong connection for some in relation to nature and Christian spirituality. The husband of couple one stated that he connects with God while moving and being outside. For some, the difficulty of “solo” time, being alone for two or three hours, was particularly difficult on them. The wife of couple two stated,

“It was hard to just be unplugged and left alone in the quiet . . . in prayer and really listen to what the Holy Spirit was putting on us, I really thought about that.” A couple of people mentioned the discomfort of this exercise, but that it was helpful. The wife of couple three mentioned her prayer time increasing because of being pushed physically, “But in that moment...putting my trust in God that no matter what happens . . . I was just physically depleted, emotionally depleted.” The husband explained further, “We weren’t focused directly on our marriage on the trip, because we were focusing on our spiritual relationship with God . . . but as she came closer to me it helped out our marriage.”

Couple four talked about how they recognized how hiking was a big metaphor for life, “You’ve got these peaks and these valleys, these struggles and these climbs, people surrounding you and encouraging you” and that up on the mountain, “You saw people probably more as they really are.” The husband continued that sentiment, “And maybe in a spiritual sense and learning each other a little better. Learning to rely on God . . . and when things are going downhill, just another valley, but they don’t last.” Couple five’s experience of praying while on the mountain had significant impact on the husband. He said, “And spiritually it’s how I’ve learned to connect with God on a different level.”

This seems to imply the impact beyond the mountain itself. While each of these examples give implications on the importance of spirituality on the trip, they don’t necessarily help determine the influence of Christian Spirituality on marital intimacy. But each of the couples described ways in which they were positively impacted, which helped to increase shared experience and therefore intimacy.

### **Limitations of Study**

The current research only involved couples that were on an adventure-based therapy trip that was not necessarily geared toward couple intimacy. A trip that was created specifically for couples may have changed the nature of the outcomes. Additionally, because the trips were not designed specifically for couples, there were individuals and others on the trip that may have distracted participating couples from time spent together. Additionally, the researcher was on each of the participating couples' adventure-based trips. This serves as both a limitation and an advantage. The limiting factor of researcher bias or the couples' desire not to speak negatively about the trip may have been restricted due to researcher's direct participation. Secondly, the participation of the researcher in the adventure-based trip gives a certain advantage knowing more of the stories of the participants and having watched the work done on the trip itself with each couple. The relatively small sample puts the research squarely in the realm of qualitative study, but also warrants a view of limited lived experience.

### **Future Research Implications**

The qualitative research done for this study shows the unique space that an Adventure-Based Therapy trip focused primarily on married couples with a Christian spiritual focus could provide. For each of the couples in the study, they were not on a trip that was made up only of married couples. A trip that was focused primarily on married couples could give different data or more robust data in research on marital intimacy. The majority of ABT is still primarily used with adolescents and young adults who are primarily single. Additionally, while there are some studies on marital intimacy, there seem to be few that integrate Christian spirituality. What impact does a couple's faith

have on their intimacy? What resources or resiliency might faith provide for these couples? There are many more aspects of the integration of these three areas and their impact on couples.

### **Conclusion**

In the field of marriage and family therapy, little has been researched in the integrative areas of wilderness, adventure, or nature. How does one look at the urbanization of the United States or the massive turn toward technology for entertainment and work and not see the potential pitfall? What might be the impact of regular walks in the park? How does it impact a couple if they retreat to a cabin in the woods for a weekend every month where they are without technology? What are the implications of building community together on an adventure-based trip? How does this help to mitigate anxiety and depression? The questions are endless as many of these questions are asked, but few are put into the context of nature or the outdoors when exploring the answers.

This study looked at the impact of an adventure-based therapy expedition on a couple's marital intimacy. The added element of Christian spirituality provides an extra layer of interest in the current research. The themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the participants; appreciation for nature, building community, care shown by partner, connecting with God outdoors, disconnecting from technology, preparation and planning together, and shared activity, point toward other areas to explore in more depth. There certainly seems to be some implications in the areas of marital intimacy and the realm of spirituality. For each of the couples who participated, positive memories that are shared with their spouse forms the foundation for their affinity for the trip. Even with the two spouses who struggled physically on their trip, the feedback on the marital

strengthening and the spiritual journey speak to the ABT medium's influence. While this is not an area that is easily explored, more studies of this nature should occur in the future with a more robust demographic of married couples.



## REFERENCES

- Bauman, P. J. (1998). Marital intimacy and spiritual well-being. *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 52(2), 133-145. doi:10.177/52F002234099805200203
- Bettmann, J., Tucker, A., Behrens, E., & Vanderloo, M. (2016). Changes in late adolescents and young adults' attachment, separation, and mental health during wilderness therapy. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 26(2), doi:10.1007/2Fs10826-016-0577-4
- Bird, K. (2015). Research evaluation of an Australian peer outdoor support therapy program for contemporary veterans' wellbeing. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 44(1/2), 46-79.
- Brittle, Z. (2014). S is for sex. retrieved from <https://www.gottman.com/blog/s-is-for-sex/>
- Bobilya, A. J., Kalisch, K. R., & Daniel, B. (2014). Participants' perceptions of their Outward Bound final expedition and the relationship to instructor supervisory position. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 37(4), 397-414. doi:10.1177/1053825913510693
- Bowen, D. J., Neill, J. T., & Crisp, S. J. (2016). Wilderness adventure therapy effects on the mental health of youth participants. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 5849-59. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.05.005
- Carlson, T., McGeorge, C., & Toomey, R. (2014). Establishing the validity of the spirituality in clinical training scale: Measuring the level of integration of

- spirituality and religion in family therapy training. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 36(2), 310-325. doi.org/10.1007/2Fs10591-013-9278-y
- Cashwell, C. S., Bentley, D. P., & Bigbee, A. (2007). Spirituality and counselor wellness. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education & Development*, 46(1), 66-81. doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1939.2007.tb00026.x
- Chandler, C. K., Holden, J. M., & Kolander, C. A. (1992). Counseling for spiritual wellness: Theory and practice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 71(2), 168-175. doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1992.tb02193.x
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Daniel, B., Bobilya, A. J., Kalisch, K. R., & McAvoy, L.H (2014). Autonomous student experiences in outdoor and Adventure Education. *Journal Of Experiential Education*, 37(1), 4-17. doi.org/10.1177/1053825913518892
- Ferneer, C. R., Gabrielsen, L. E., Andersen, A. W., & Mesel, T. (2017). Unpacking the black box of wilderness therapy. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(1), 114. doi: 10.1177/1049732316655776
- Finlay, L. (2013). Unfolding the phenomenological research process: Iterative stages of 'seeing afresh'. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 53(2), 172-201. doi:10.1177/0022167812453877
- Fletcher, T. B., & Hinkle, J. S. (2002). Adventure based counseling: An innovation in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 80(3), 277. doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.202.tb00192.x

- Gabrielsen, L. E., Fernee, C. R., Aasen, G. O., & Eskedal, L. T. (2016). Why randomized trials are challenging within adventure therapy research. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 39(1), 5-14. doi.org/10.1177/1053825915607535
- Goldenberg, M., & Pronsolino, D. (2008). A means-end investigation of outcomes associated with Outward Bound and NOLS programs. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 30(3), 271-276. doi.org/10.1177/105382590703000310
- Harris, K. A., Randolph, B. E., & Gordon, T. D. (2016). What do clients want? Assessing spiritual needs in counseling: A literature review. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 3(4), 250-275. doi.org/10.1037/scp0000108
- Heintzman, P. (2009). Nature-based recreation and spirituality: A complex relationship. *Leisure Sciences*, 32(1), 72-89. doi.org/10.1080/01490400903430897
- Hill, N. R. (2007). Wilderness therapy as a treatment modality for at-risk youth: A primer for mental health counselors. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 29(4), 338. doi.org/10.17744/mehc.29.4.c6121j162j43178
- Hitzhusen, G. E. (2004). Understanding the role of spirituality and theology, in outdoor environmental education: A mixed method characterization of 12 Christian and Jewish outdoor programs. *Research in Outdoor Education*, 739-56. EBSCOhost (accessed January 17, 2018).
- Katsogianni, I. V., & Kleftras, G. (2015). Spirituality, meaning in life, and depressive symptomatology in drug addiction. *International Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Society*, 5(2), 11-24. doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/cgp/v05i02/51104

- Kelly, V. A. (2006). Women of courage: A personal account of a wilderness-based experiential group for survivors of abuse. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 31*(2), 99-111. doi:10.1080/01933920500493571
- Larivière, M., Couture, R., Ritchie, S. D., Côté, D., Oddson, B., & Wright, J. (2012). Behavioral assessment of wilderness therapy participants: Exploring the consistency of observational data. *Journal of Experiential Education, 35*(1), 290-302. doi.org/10.5193/jee35.1.290
- Margalit, D., & Ben-Ari, A. b. (2014). The effect of wilderness therapy on adolescents' cognitive autonomy and self-efficacy: Results of a non-randomized trial. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 43*(2), 181-194. doi:10.1007/s10566-013-9234-x
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Mutz, M., & Müller, J. (2016). Mental health benefits of outdoor adventures: Results from two pilot studies. *Journal of Adolescence, 49*, 105-114. doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.03.009
- Wolfe, L. M. (1979). *John of the mountains: The unpublished journals of John Muir*. Madison, WI: Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Reese, R. F., Lewis, T. F., Myers, J. E., Wahesh, E., & Iversen, R. (2014). Relationship between nature relatedness and holistic wellness: An exploratory study. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, 53*(1), 63-79. doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1939.2014.00050.x

- Reese, R. F., & Myers, J. E. (2012). EcoWellness: The missing factor in holistic wellness models. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 90*(4), 400-406. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2012.00050.x
- Schnarch, D. E. (1991). *Constructing the sexual crucible: An integration of sexual and marital therapy*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton
- Sternburg, Robert J. *Duplex theory of love: triangular theory of love and theory of love as a story*. Retrieved from <http://www.robertjsternberg.com/love/>.
- Sundaram, Lakshmi (2014). Let's take it outside: Nature as a dynamic partnership in therapeutic relationship. *Counseling and Spirituality, 33*(1), 51-69. doi: 10.2143/CS.33.1.3044830
- Tani, F., Pascuzzi, D., & Raffagnino, R. (2015). Emotion regulation and quality of close relationship: The effects of emotion dysregulation processes on couple intimacy. *BPA - Applied Psychology Bulletin (Bollettino Di Psicologia Applicata), 63*(272), 3-15. EBSCOhost (accessed January 17, 2018).
- Tucker, A. R., Javorski, S., Tracy, J., & Beale, B. (2013). The use of adventure therapy in community-based mental health: Decreases in problem severity among youth clients. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 42*(2), 155-179. doi:10.1007/s10566-012-9190-x
- Walsh, F. (2009). *Spiritual resources in family therapy, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York, NY: Guilford.
- Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2008). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

## APPENDIX A

### Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885



March 8, 2018

Eddie Boyer

Dept. of MFT

ACU Box 29466

Abilene Christian University

Dear Eddie,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that the changes you requested on the Study Amendment Form dated 2/27/18 for the project titled Adventure Based Therapy: Couple Intimacy with Christian Spirituality

(IRB# 17-107 ) have been approved on 3/08/2018 by expedited review. The changes requested and approved are summarized below:

Gathering couples from wilderness experiences other than Voice of Wilderness

to:

initial application and consent forms

If you wish to make any further changes to this study, please complete a new Study Amendment Request Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent

#### **Title of Study:** Adventure Based Therapy: Couple Intimacy with Christian Spirituality

You may be eligible to take part in a research study. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you, the potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions that you may have regarding the procedures, your involvement, and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

Also, please note that your participation is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please contact the Principal Investigator if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or if at any time you wish to withdraw. This contact information may be found at the end of this form.

#### **Purpose and Procedures**

**Purpose of the Research--** The purpose of this research is to explore the experience of married couples on a Christian spiritually focused wilderness adventure and the impact on their intimacy as a couple.

**Expected Duration of participation--** If selected for participation, you will be asked to attend 1 visits with the study staff over the course of one day. Each visit is expected to take 2 hours.

**Description of the procedures--** Once you consent to participation in the study, you will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

**Screening—** You will initially be screened to determine your eligibility for participating in the study. This screening will involve Christian couples, having participated in a wilderness expedition trip in the last 3-5 years. Couples will be selected based response to invitation by the principle investigator.

**Study Procedures--** Study procedure will involve an approximately 2 hour online interview. The following questions will be asked in semi-structured interview style:

1. **Describe to me your experiences on the wilderness expedition trip, what did you do, see, fondest memories?**
2. **Describe how the experience affected your marital relationship?**
3. **What was the effect of the outdoor experiences on your couple intimacy?**
4. **How did the integration of Christian Spirituality affect your experience together?**
5. **How have you seen your marital intimacy change as result of this experience together?**

Your participation may be terminated early by the investigators under certain conditions, such as if you no longer meet the eligibility criteria, the researchers believe it is no longer in your best interest to continue participating, you do not follow the instructions provided by the researchers, or the study is discontinued. You will be contacted by the investigators and given further instructions in the event that you are withdrawn by the investigators.

## **Risks and Discomforts**

The researchers have taken steps to minimize the risks associated with this study. However, if you experience any problems, you may contact Eddie Boyer

The researchers and ACU do not have any plan to pay for any injuries or problems you may experience as a result of your participation in this research.

## **Potential Benefits**

You may not experience any personal benefits from participating in the study, but as stories are told and thoughts are shared you may remember the emotions and experiences of the trip. The researchers hope that the information learned from this study will help others in similar situations in the future.

## **Alternative Procedures or Treatments**

None

## **Provisions for Confidentiality**



Information collected about you will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with the law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Aside from these required disclosures, your confidentiality will be protected by use of pseudo names during the writing of the results. All recordings of the interviews will be double password protected and erased upon transcription. All other correspondence will be kept in password protected folders for participants confidentiality.

## Costs and Compensation

None

## Contacts

You may ask any questions that you have at this time. However, if you have additional questions, concerns, or complaints in the future, you may contact the Principal Investigator of this study. The Principal Investigator is Edward Boyer, M.A and may be contacted at (832)723-0403, or email [erb95j@acu.edu](mailto:erb95j@acu.edu).

If you are unable to reach the Principal Investigator or wish to speak to someone other than the Principal Investigator, you may contact Dr. Dale Bertram, LMFT: [dale.bertram@acu.edu](mailto:dale.bertram@acu.edu) .

If you have concerns about this study or general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Director of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(325) 674-2885

[megan.roth@acu.edu](mailto:megan.roth@acu.edu)

320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103

Abilene, TX 79699

## Consent Signature Section

Please sign this form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Sign only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You should receive a copy of this signed consent form. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form.

---

Printed Name of Participant Signature of Participant Date

---

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Signature of Person Obtaining Date  
Consent