CONNECTING THEORY TO PROGRAMMING: USING EXISTENTIALISM AND ADVENTURE BASED COUNSELING WITH ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract
Adventure based counseling programs have been used with adolescents in a variety of settings. Typically, adventure based counseling programs are group oriented and help participants take responsibility for their own actions, increase self-awareness and connect with others. One potential limitation of adventure based counseling programs is that they are rarely identified with any established counseling theory. In fact, adventure based counseling programs have been labeled as being experience rich and theory poor (Warren, 2006). This article aims to establish a connection between the tenets of Existentialism and the characteristics and outcomes of adventure based counseling programs.

Applying Theory to Practice:
EXISTENTIALISM AND ADVENTURE BASED COUNSELING

Adventure Based Counseling (ABC), and in particular low-element challenge courses (LECC), are group oriented programs that help participants learn to increase self-awareness, accept responsibility for their choices, and connect with others. These outcomes are consistent with the tenets of Existential Theory, such that an intentional combination of the two approaches offers a unique opportunity to help adolescents—specifically delinquent youth—achieve positive therapeutic outcomes.

The use of outdoor activities as team-building techniques has become increasingly popular (Springett, 1987), however the field of ABC has been identified by many as being experience rich and theory poor (Warren, 2006). In typical ABC programs, participants are removed from their normal social context and engage in a number of activities that often are not directly related to the group's primary purpose, with the aim of attaining new goals, both as individuals and as a group (Martin & Davids, 1995). Outdoor adventure programs such as challenge courses are often utilized as interventions for youth coming from urban settings (Davis, Ray, & Sayles, 1995) and are identified as Adventure-Based Counseling programs, or ABC. ABC includes a combination of experiential learning, outdoor education, and group counseling strategies that can be adapted to a variety of settings (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). It incorporates behavioral, cognitive, and affective components in an integrated process of events intended to promote positive change (Fletcher & Smith, 1999; Priest & Gass, 1997; Schoel et al., 1988).

Participants in ABC programs experience psychological, sociological, educational, and physical benefits that can help improve their self-concept, self-confidence, and well-being (Ewert, 1989; Kelly & Baer, 1971; William & Chun, 1973). Although these benefits are desirable for all stages of human development, ABC programs have proven especially useful with adolescents at risk for delinquent behaviors. ABC programs have shown a variety of positive results with young people including improved self-concepts, decreased anxiety, increased positive attitudes toward school (Lieberman & DeVos, 1982), increased group cohesion (Glass & Benshoff, 2002), and has produced positive results in identity development (Kaly & Heesacker, 2003) and treatment programs for adjudicated youth (Sakofs & Schuurman, 1991).
Despite these findings, programs have yet to experience full acceptance from the counseling community as a viable approach for working with adolescents. One reason for this could be that adventure therapy leaders have not collected comprehensive and indisputable evidence regarding the impacts of their various programs (Bruyere, 2002). Another potential issue keeping ABC programs from experiencing mainstream acceptance is the lack of attachment to mainstream counseling theories. Daniels and White (1994) stated that a clearly-defined theoretical perspective is a “hallmark of professionalism” (p. 106). If ABC hopes to experience this level of professionalism, it is important that such programs work to adhere to a well-known and accepted theory of working with others. Bauman and Waldo (1998) go so far as to state that “theory is what gives full meaning to the practice of and research in counseling” (p. 13).

Efforts have been made to connect ABC with well-known and respected counseling theories. Glass and Myers (2001) discussed how ABC could be implemented based on the tenets of Adler’s Individual Psychology. This article seeks to expand and build on that idea, connecting ABC with another theory, Existentialism. In this article, low-element challenge course (LECC) programs are briefly described and the benefits of these programs are considered. Existential Theory (ET) is described, including theoretical perspectives and interventions. A case study is presented to demonstrate the application Existential Theory to an LECC program to help a disruptive adolescent become a cooperative member of his peer group. Implications for counselors are considered. The manuscript aims to build on the previous article (Glass & Myers, 2001), showing how a similar experience can be worked with using a different theoretical approach.

ADVENTURE BASED COUNSELING AND LOW-ELEMENT CHALLENGE COURSES

The beginning of ABC can be traced back to the 1940s, when Kurt Hahn and Lawrence Holt developed a wilderness program that later became known as Outward Bound (Harris, Mealy, Matthews, Lucas & Moczygemma, 1993), the foundation for future ABC programs. Upon the introduction of Outward Bound to North America in 1962, wilderness programming experienced a period of relative growth in the United States (Attarian, 2002). Today, many types of programming fall under the umbrella of “Adventure Based Counseling.” One such program is a low-element challenge course (LECC), also referred to as challenge courses.

While LECC’s are encompassed by the ABC label, there are some unique characteristics which set these programs apart from others. It is possible for some adventure programs to last weeks or months (Harris et al., 1993), however, low-element challenge courses are typically shorter in duration, at times lasting only a few hours. In addition, Outward Bound as well as other ABC programs may utilize high-element exercises constructed 25 or more feet above the ground (Steinfeld, 1997), whereas LECC programs consist of activities that are constructed closer to the ground, requiring less physical risk of the participants. Finally, a third difference is that LECC programs are generally conducted in groups and emphasize group cooperation to a greater extent than do some high-element ABC programs.

While understanding these differences, it is important to note that both ABC and LECC programs attempt to push participants outside of their physical and psychological comfort zones and help them effectively deal with perceived risk and the resulting fears. The concept of perceived risk has been an important component of most adventure based counseling programs (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002). LECC programs consist of a series of exercises, also referred to as elements. The elements are designed to require participants to work together to solve problems or challenges (Steinfeld, 1997). The elements used will differ according to desired outcomes, which will vary according to the clientele being served (Harris et al., 1993).

Participation in ABC activities has become increasingly popular and is being implemented with various populations, including college students (Hatch & McCarthy, 2006), persons with disabilities (Ardovino, 2004), and older adults (Sugerman, 2003). However, though programs are implemented with a variety of diverse populations,
much of the literature focuses on the use of ABC programs with adolescents, as more programs have been developed to work with adolescents on life-skills issues such as communication, problem-solving and group cooperation (Moote & Wodarski, 1997).

Given that today there are hundreds of outdoor programs in the United States which serve adolescents (Bruyere, 2002), it is important that counselors make an effort to ground this type of programming in theory. While efforts have been made before to bridge the tenets of a theory to ABC programs (Glass & Myers, 2001), additional work is needed to demonstrate how theory and these programs may be connected. One theory, Existentialism, seems particularly appropriate to use when working with adolescents on ABC programs.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

According to Existential Theory, all human experience is part of the larger human condition (Carlson, 2003). This is especially true when the intensity of the experience is enough to impact the experiences of other human beings (Bankart, 1997). Existentialism came about in an effort to address questions related to man’s existence (Fitzgerald, 2005). Part of the process involved in finding the purpose and meaning in one’s life includes awareness of individuals’ freedom to choose and the ability to create one’s own life (Fitzgerald, 2005). Even though a number of authors regard adolescence as the time when many people first encounter issues related to adolescence (Chessick, 1996; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003), little literature exists which relates the concepts of existentialism to adolescents (Fitzgerald, 2005).

An important tenet of Existential Theory is authenticity. An individual can become more authentic by increasing his or her awareness of self, others, and the world around them. Bugental (1965) stated that this authenticity does not exist in absolute terms, but occurs on a continuum. The individuals’ phenomenological viewpoint, or how they perceive their situation, is essential. The distorted perceptions clients have about their personal issues or problems are of equal importance as the problem itself (Miars, 2002).

Existentialists do not emphasize instinctive drives, instead focusing on a person’s inevitable confrontation with the givens of the human condition. These givens include isolation, meaninglessness, freedom and anxiety as a result of authenticity.

Within the Existential framework, the term isolation refers to the idea that no matter how close one person gets to another, that individual must still face the complexities of life and death alone. Despite our desire to connect with others or be protected by them, we enter and leave the world alone (Bauman & Waldo, 1998). Loneliness is an aspect of the human condition that individuals can learn to accept (Bauman & Waldo, 1998).

The concern regarding isolation is so great, that some authors have deemed it the central concern of psychotherapy (Hammer, 1972). Corey (2001) states that although this isolation is not something that can be “cured”, individuals can derive strength from the experience of looking inward and understanding this separation. Still, it is important to note that this idea of isolation does not equal total self-estrangement. As human beings we need to make connections with others (Corey, 2001). By becoming more authentic, persons can more readily form healthy, equal relationships with other individuals. Ojala (2005) suggests that identity and moral development in today’s society includes finding oneself in a greater social context. Therefore, adolescents not only must consider the world around them in their search for identity, but they must also recognize how they affect the world by their behaviors (Ojala, 2005).

A common thread all human beings have is the need for significance or purpose in life (Corey, 2001). Meaninglessness refers to the understanding that there is no meaning inherent in our existence (Bauman & Waldo, 1998). There is no built-in meaning to our lives, simply because we exist (Chaffins & McConnell, 2002). Meaninglessness often stems from individuals’ awareness that there is no prescribed direction or plan for their lives (Bauman & Waldo, 1998). Viktor Frankl and R. D. Laing proposed that
connecting with one’s true self leads to a more meaningful existence (Bankart, 1997). Frankl (1984) emphasized the importance of individual’s finding meaning in their own existence.

The realization that death is an ultimate consequence of life causes individuals to seek meaning. Within the framework of ET, death is seen as a basic human condition that gives significance to life (Corey, 2001). As humans, we have the unique capacity to understand that our lives are not infinite. We are aware of the temporary nature of life, and as a result are then able to understand the importance of the present. May (1981) suggested that our capacity to understand death is the source of our enthusiasm for life. Within ET, clients are encouraged to understand that they are responsible for the meaning found in their own lives. While individuals strive for a connectedness to others, they should not rely on the feedback or praise of others to discover that meaning. Frankl’s work is based on the idea that discovering meaning is the main human motivation (Bauman & Waldo, 1998), and that this meaning is realized by the individual rather than received by sources other than the self (Williams & Fabry, 1968).

Freedom suggests that people are free to choose among options available to them, and therefore have a role in creating their destinies (Corey, 2001). Having this freedom to choose, in turn makes individuals responsible for the choices they make. As people have this freedom, they must then accept the responsibility for the direction of their lives (Corey, 2001). Authenticity can be achieved when human beings accept the responsibility they have in controlling their lives and begin to make decisions based on the values they determine for themselves through self-awareness (Bauman & Waldo, 1998).

Another given of the human condition is anxiety. Existential anxiety comes from our understanding of mortality, a lack of a preordained purpose, and our responsibility for determining the direction of our own lives (Bauman & Waldo, 1998). Anxiety is an indirect result of our increased awareness of the before-mentioned givens in Existentialism. This experience is normal and can be beneficial in the growth towards authenticity.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY AND ADVENTURE BASED COUNSELING

An adventure based counseling low-element challenge course program grounded in the tenets of Existentialism should focus on the attainment of a higher self-awareness and authenticity. Participants should be given repeated opportunities to reflect on their unique viewpoints, and understand how those viewpoints fit within the framework of the group setting.

Too much or too little freedom, determined by the leadership style of the counselor, can result in the participants feeling unbalanced. This imbalance in freedom and/or responsibility may cause them to seek more structure or adventure in their lives (Carlson, 2003). Diamond (1996) suggested that the ordinary may be seen by some as an existential threat and engage in violence in order to get thrills. This may be escalated in some settings, such as schools, where students participate in predictable and repetitive behaviors (Gorski & Pilotto, 1993). Many delinquent youth experience this perceived lack of freedom and potentially could benefit from the unique setting of an ABC program, which removes them from their normal and predictable environments.

Frankl (1984) stated that even though we may not be free from all conditions, we are free to choose how we react to our situations. Many adolescents are at risk for delinquent behaviors due to external forces that they feel are beyond their control. Counselors in an ABC program should challenge individuals’ perceptions and encourage them to take ownership of both explicit and implicit choices they make (Miars, 2002). Adventure based counseling has been frequently utilized as a means of working with at risk youth.

Human beings are both connected and alone. Individuals must be able to accept this and find strength within themselves in order to develop healthy relationships with others (Corey, 2001). Adventure based counseling programs require goal setting for the individual as well as for the group.
Participants play equal parts in working together during tasks or elements of the program. However, they are also taught that each person ultimately only has control over his or her own actions.

Human suffering can at times be positive and promote growth depending on how the individual decides to respond to it (Corey, 2001). Yalom (1980) and Frankl (1984) both believed that meaning in life is achieved obliquely. Purpose is usually followed by an increased awareness of the other tenets or themes of ET. Also pursued implicitly, ABC programs achieve goals by working on activities that are not directly related to the group’s purpose.

Finally, facilitators of adventure based counseling groups anticipate and even encourage group members’ anxiety. It takes members out of their comfort zones, which tends to produce some level of anxiety or frustration. With the help of the group leader and the other group members, these anxieties are confronted and worked through by processing the experience. Existential anxiety is viewed positively because it signifies an individual’s progression towards authenticity (Miars, 2002). ABC programs challenge participants to face their fears and anxieties that accompany this existential journey.

CASE STUDY
The following case study is taken from the practice of one of the authors. It describes the use of ET in a LECC setting with a group of 16 adolescents who were part of one classroom. They were referred by their teacher as a result of repetitive disruptive behavior and were described by the teacher as unmotivated and not having goals to strive towards. The teacher wanted to help them learn to work together more effectively, as well as encourage them to set higher goals for their lives than she currently thought they had developed. In LECC terms, the purpose was to increase group cohesion and emphasize personal responsibility. From an ET perspective, the goals were to help the group members take responsibility for the direction of their lives and the choices they make, to provide situations where participants would deal with issues of personal freedom first-hand, to help students set attainable goals for the future, and to confront issues related to the anxiety that is a byproduct of being in an LECC program.

Design of the LECC
The group participated for approximately 8 hours in a low-element challenge course experience at an outdoor facility in a southeastern state. The program is based on the Project Adventure model and uses low elements (activities constructed low to the ground) that require the participation of all group members in order to successfully complete the challenges. This caused group members to share responsibility and work to solve problems as a team. Processing, facilitated by a trained leader in LECC, took place after each element was attempted. The PARS Model (Glass & Benshoff, 1999) was used to facilitate the processing, and participants were encouraged to apply what they had learned to issues they were facing in their everyday lives.

Activities
Five of the activities used during the program are described below. In each case, the criteria for success are also specified.

TP Shuffle – Participants stand shoulder to shoulder in a random order on a 2”x 4” board approximately 15 feet in length that is positioned 6 inches above the ground. The group leader then asks the group to line up in order of their birthdays. To get in order the group must follow these directions: a) no one in the group is allowed to touch the ground, doing so would cause the group to start over in their original order; b) the group members are allowed and encouraged to touch and hold onto one another; and, c) when in order they must notify the group leader. The challenge is completed when the group is correctly in order.

Mine Field – A collection of items (ex., tennis balls, milk cartons, trash, etc.) is scattered on the ground so that they are randomly, but somewhat equally, distributed within the designated field of play. Participants then pair up and one member of each pair is blindfolded and asked to stand on one end of the play area. The object is for the participants who are not blindfolded to stand
across the play area from their counterparts and verbally guide their partners through the “mine field” to the far side. Touching one of the mines requires the blindfolded participant to return to the beginning and try again. The partners then switch positions and the other person is then blindfolded and guided through the play area. The challenge is completed when all of the participants safely reach the other side of the mine field.

The Swinging Log – A log (approximately 15 feet in length) is suspended 6 inches above the ground by ropes. The log will swing freely as participants attempt to stand on it. All members of the group must stand on the log without using the ropes for support for 5 seconds. The challenge is complete when the 5 second count is successfully reached.

The Beam – The object of this element is to physically move a group up and over a horizontally suspended beam, located approximately 8 feet off the ground. Everyone in the group must make it up and over the beam in order to achieve the goal. No more than two participants should be on the beam at one time, with one additional person in the process of going over. Once participants have gone over the beam they may not return to the beginning and physically help a person needing to go over, although all persons are responsible for spotting each other. The challenge is complete when all members of the group have successfully moved up and over the suspended log.

Trust Fall – A participant is asked to stand upon a platform (up to 6 feet off the ground) and fall backwards into the arms of a prepared group of spotters. There should be at least 10-12 individuals standing on level ground to catch the person falling. The person falling should keep his/her arms closely tucked to the sides of their body and fall with a rigid posture, not bending at the waist. The challenge is completed when all participants are safely caught as they fall from the platform.

Initial Stages of Group

As the class arrived at the outdoor facility, they were remarkably quiet given that they had just completed an hour-long bus ride, and appeared hesitant to be too enthusiastic about their involvement in the program. During the initial stages of this group, the members engaged in a variety of warm-up exercises aimed at helping them relax and become more comfortable in the new setting. Members were encouraged to identify issues they felt were important, and spent time developing rules and limits they agreed to follow as they participated in the program. As is typical with new groups, the members did not immediately speak up with suggestions regarding the rules and limits they would place on themselves. The rules developed by the group included being respectful of other group members (not talking over each other), and focusing on keeping each other safe. The facilitator used this time as an opportunity to observe the group members and assess potential needs of the group.

Coping with Acting Out Behaviors

The group members worked relatively well together as they engaged in approximately 30 minutes of “warm-up” activities. They listened to instructions, and effectively participated in the activities presented to them. Upon leaving the warm-up activities and moving into the woods to engage in more difficult group activities, this cohesion and cooperation started to erode. As the activities presented to the group became more challenging both mentally and physically, members began to participate less and increasingly argued with one another. The participants interrupted one another regularly, blamed others for the difficulty the group was experiencing, and at one point, a male member sat down and displayed an unwillingness to continue with the challenge. Previously, the same individual had made the comment, “This is stupid,” and did little to aid in the completion of the challenges. The group leader allowed this behavior to continue while attempting a couple of activities, until it became clear that the members would not successfully complete the present challenge (the beam). Safety also became a concern as the challenge presented more opportunities for participants to be physically hurt.

This type of behavior is not uncommon when working with adolescents in ABC programs, and patience becomes a valuable characteristic of counselors. The group will work together more
effectively when all of the group members are allowed to participate in the activities. Therefore, the counselor will often go to great lengths, or put up with behavior that would not be allowed in other counseling settings, in an effort to keep all group members active in the experience. The main issue to be evaluated at this point is the safety of all of the group members. If the safety of the other group members were to be compromised as a result of the one participant’s behavior, then that individual might have been asked to sit out for one activity. Instead, it was the counselor’s judgment not to ask the participant to sit out, but to take time to stop the activity and have the group spend some time processing what was taking place.

At this stage, the counselor stopped the group and asked each of them to sit down in a circle so they could face each other. To help the group members refocus and stay on task, the counselor asked, “How well are we adhering to the rules we set for our group?” This reminded the group of their desire to be respectful of one another, and they were easily able to identify ways in which they were falling short of this goal, including not listening to one another, and placing blame. The group leader then asked the participants what responsibility each individual had on the success of the group. This led to a discussion regarding how each individual was responsible for his or her own actions, and how these actions either contributed to, or detracted from, the group’s ability to be successful on the various challenges.

It was here, based on the tenets of Existentialism, that the leader guided the discussion towards a focus on choices being made within the group. Interestingly enough, without further prompting from the counselor, one group member suggested that each member had the freedom to decide whether or not to help the group succeed, but by not aiding in the process, the group would surely fail at the current challenge, as well as on each challenge attempted thereafter. Following this statement, another participant offered that group members were likely to get out of the activities whatever they put into them, suggesting that no meaning would come from the experience unless they were all willing to work together.

The group continued discussing the choice some members were making, the choice not to actively help the group succeed on the challenge. The leader posed the question, “What effect do our choices in this group have on the other members?” This question illuminated the Existential notion that all choices have consequences. The consequences being experienced within the group included personal as well as interpersonal consequences. The conversation continued for a few minutes until one group member confronted another member as to why he was not helping the group work on the challenge (the beam).

The group member being addressed replied, “I don’t know.” However, after a brief pause in conversation, he disclosed that he was not sure he would be able to be successful, and was worried that he would come across as looking foolish in front of his peers. The adolescent suggested that he often found himself in this situation, not participating for fear of embarrassing himself. He emphasized that he often was too scared or anxious to try things. It was pointed out that although the member was trying to avoid “looking stupid” in front of the others, he was serving to alienate himself from the group as he repeatedly caused them to be unsuccessful in their attempts to complete the challenge. Dealing with anxieties of life is an important component of the Existential theory. The adolescent being described here was adopting an uncooperative role that he had previously adopted. He filled this role because he did not feel comfortable enough to risk participation with the group.

The group leader then redirected the discussion back to the issue of getting meaning out of the experience. He posed the question, “What meaning do you expect to get from this experience, and for that matter, what meaning do you see in participating in life outside of this group?” A number of group members were able to readily identify expectations from the adventure based experience. Those expectations included a better idea of how to deal with challenges (in life, not just on the challenge course), an improved
ability to problem solve, and a positive experience working with others to accomplish common tasks. When group members were once again asked to think about what meaning they had in their lives outside of the group, they were then able to transfer the learning from within the group to their lives as individuals outside of the group. Responses included two persons who stated they wanted to have families, nice homes and nice cars, to other members who referred to friends and one who simply stated that he wanted to be more successful in life than what most people thought was possible for him.

The members dealt with these issues effectively and with a more cohesive tone, as the conversation became more encouraging and the individuals supported one another’s anxieties rather than dismiss them or make light of them. As mentioned earlier, development often produces anxiety (Guardo, 1977), and the other group members demonstrated the necessary tolerance of this anxiety in order to help the group move forward. Efforts were made by the group leader to remind the participants that they were responsible for the choices they made in this group, as well as choices made outside of the group. As they were witnessing during the ABC activities, the choices of one person had individual consequences, as well as a ripple effect on the other members of the group.

After a final reminder of the goals they set for themselves, and developing a new strategy for completing “the beam”, the group continued working on the current challenge. They were able to successfully complete “the beam” after only two more attempts.

**Group Process and Outcome**

Throughout the course of the day, group members were able to accomplish both individual and group goals. While completing the various activities, group members demonstrated the ability to work effectively with others on a common goal, while also acknowledging the personal responsibility each of them had in relation to completing the tasks. Through group processing, participants discussed the freedom each of them had in determining the success of the group. Members had the ability to help or hinder the progress of the group, and were able to recognize choices and identify potential consequences of the choices they made. Participants acknowledged perceptions others (ex., peers, teachers, authority figures, parents, etc.) had of them, and displayed an understanding of the low expectations people had of them. Perhaps more importantly, they were also able to exhibit an awareness of their roles in affecting those perceptions, and talked about how their behaviors do not always give others the idea that they can be successful in school and life.

The use of Existential Theory with an ABC program was successful in this case scenario as evidenced by the group cohesion, awareness of personal responsibility, and attempts to identify meaning in their lives that was displayed by the group during the remainder of the program. This is not to suggest that the group did not continue to have issues that warranted discussion or processing by the counselor. However, when these issues did arise, the counselor once again would engage the group in processing, and the individuals became more effective at dealing with these issues on their own with little input from the group leader. Later in the day, the group even engaged in processing on their own without prompting from the counselor, going so far as to suggest that they needed time to sit and talk to each other. During these times, topics of responsibility and anxieties were frequently discussed. In addition, at the conclusion of the day, the group members processed (again with little direction from the counselor) an in-depth examination of the course they wanted their lives to take, and the meaning they hoped their lives would have as they got older. This process allowed participants to accept their responsibility for their actions, and enabled them to recognize the freedom they have in making choices.

LECC programs work well with the tenets of ET. Following Existential principles, the LECC program makes it possible for group members to be connected with others while accepting their responsibilities as an individual, aids them in finding meaning in what they are doing, aids them in recognizing personal freedoms, and deals with
anxieties in a productive manner. The ultimate goal of this would then be to help participants become more authentic.

**DISCUSSION**

The process employed in the case described above adheres to the Existential premise that the client is responsible for his or her choices and actions. Existentialists focus on individuals’ awareness of the before mentioned tenets. Participants must assess their lives in order to determine whether they are involved in healthy, equal relationships with others. Initially, group members blamed one another for their inability to complete the tasks. However, after help from the group leader, they became aware of the imperative importance of each member’s involvement. Furthermore, they were then encouraged to explore how their experiences and relationships with other members of the group related to their experiences and relationships outside of the group, or those relationships they are involved in back in their daily environments.

Existentialists value clients as independent individuals who have directed their lives up until this point (Miars, 2002). Like most at-risk youth, these participants credited the difficulties experienced in life to outside factors. ABC leaders, viewing the experience through an Existential lens, helped members recognize how they have played an active role in their situations and that they are capable of positively redirecting their lives. After processing their performance and feelings about the activities, members realized that each of them were ultimately responsible for their own actions, which in turn affected the groups’ overall performance.

Anxiety in the form of withdrawal and attacking one another resulted from members becoming more cognizant of their personal responsibility. Anxiety is welcomed in both ABC and Existentialism as a catalyst for growth. Group leaders use this anxiety to facilitate discussions between members during the debriefing process.

Adventure-based counseling can be applicable to many aspects of participants’ everyday lives. Members could relate their experiences with the activities as well as with other members to other situations they have encountered in their lives. The hope is that as members become more self-aware and responsible, they will in turn lead more authentic lives. Using Existentialism as a theoretical basis for ABC, counselors emphasize the attainment of a higher self-awareness, authenticity, and the freedom to choose how participants react to various situations, while encouraging participants to find strength within themselves in order to develop healthy relationships with others. This increased awareness and authenticity is desired so that participants may have a better understanding of purpose or meaning in their lives.

Existentialism provides counselors with a framework and direction while leading adolescent groups through adventure based activities. Counselors use theory as a foundation from which they work with their clients. Working with adolescents participating in an adventure based counseling program while adhering to the tenets of Existentialism, provides a focus from which discussion and processing may take place. Existential counselors in these settings emphasize anxieties, increased self-awareness and authenticity, while guiding clients to engage in the process of discovering personal meanings for themselves and their group. Adolescents who have a greater sense of self-awareness are more likely to recognize areas in their lives in need of change, and therefore will be better equipped to implement these changes.
References


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