

# Wild Epiphany: Turning Youth Care Inside Out



# Introduction

1. Research question
2. Rationale
3. Social Work and the Environment
4. Literature
5. Methodology and Methods
6. Findings
7. Discussion
8. Conclusion



# Research Question

What are the recounted characteristics of epiphany amongst male youth mandated to attend a wilderness based residential attendance program?

# Rationale



- 1 The era environmental degradation is upon us;
- 1 Social work literature does not consider the using nature as a context for treatment;
- 1 The mechanism of the change within wilderness programs is not identified.

# Social Work and the Environment



- ▶ Social workers are being urged to consider environmental issues in their practice.
- ▶ Issues regarding the environment appear absent from ground level social work.

# What do I mean by Epiphany?

## Ancient Terms:

- ▶ Mystic Experience
- ▶ Samadhi
- ▶ Rapture
- ▶ Satori
- ▶ Nirvana
- ▶ Grace

## Modern Terms:

- ▶ Authentic Experience
- ▶ Quantum Change
- ▶ Transformational Change
- ▶ Peak Experience

# Literature Review:

1) Peak Experience

2) Wilderness Therapy



# What are the Characteristics of Peak Experiences?



An overwhelming sense of:

- Joy
- Euphoria
- Deep pleasure
- Wonder or Awe
- Feeling a sense of belonging or purpose
- Feeling profound understanding

# What are the Benefits of Peak Experiences?

**As a result of having a peak experience the individual is usually changed so that he or she is more psychologically healthy. (Maslow, 1970)**



# Who has Peak Experiences?

Hoffman (1998), Hoffman & Muramoto, (2007); and Magen (1983), claim that children and youth are as capable of having peak experiences as adults.

# Peak Experiences and Nature

**“peak experiences can result from uplifting experiences in places of scenic grandeur [and] inspiring encounters with nature...”**



(Hoffman, 1998, p. 115).

# What is Wilderness Therapy?



- ▶ **eco-psychology**
- ▶ **adventure therapy and education**
- ▶ **wilderness experience therapy**
- ▶ **outdoor skills challenge courses**

# Camp Trapping - Wilderness Therapy

- ▶ A wilderness based residential attendance program.
- ▶ Wilderness trips are a key component of the program.
- ▶ 4 month stay for youth.



# The Connection?

**“...the positive aspects of these programs are often assumed though little considered debate has occurred on how...these programs improve mental health outcome.”** (Unger et al.

2005, p.320).



# Methods



- ▶ Participants
- ▶ Sampling
- ▶ The Interview
- ▶ Transcription
- ▶ Triangulation
- ▶ Member Checking
- ▶ Peer Debriefing
- ▶ Reflexivity
- ▶ Audit Trail
- ▶ Limitations

# Methodology: Phenomenology



Seeks the appearance or essence of a phenomena or experience.

The lived experience is of primary interest.

# Methodology: Heuristics

“Data that emerges is autobiographical, original and descriptive of the textures and structures of lived experience.” (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p.40)



# Findings: The Moment

David recollects his wild epiphany using spectacular terms. He describes his epiphany as a transcendence of everyday life.



# Findings: The value of the moment

James speaks to the value of his wild epiphany. The impact has been long lasting, easily recollected almost two decades later.



# Findings: Observing the moment

Peter observed a young man overtaken by the wild epiphany. His memory of the moment will forever stay with him.



# Findings: The epiphany is freeing

The “front”, or posturing, constructed by youth to meet their needs in society loses its utility in the wilderness.



# Findings: Anger is dissipated

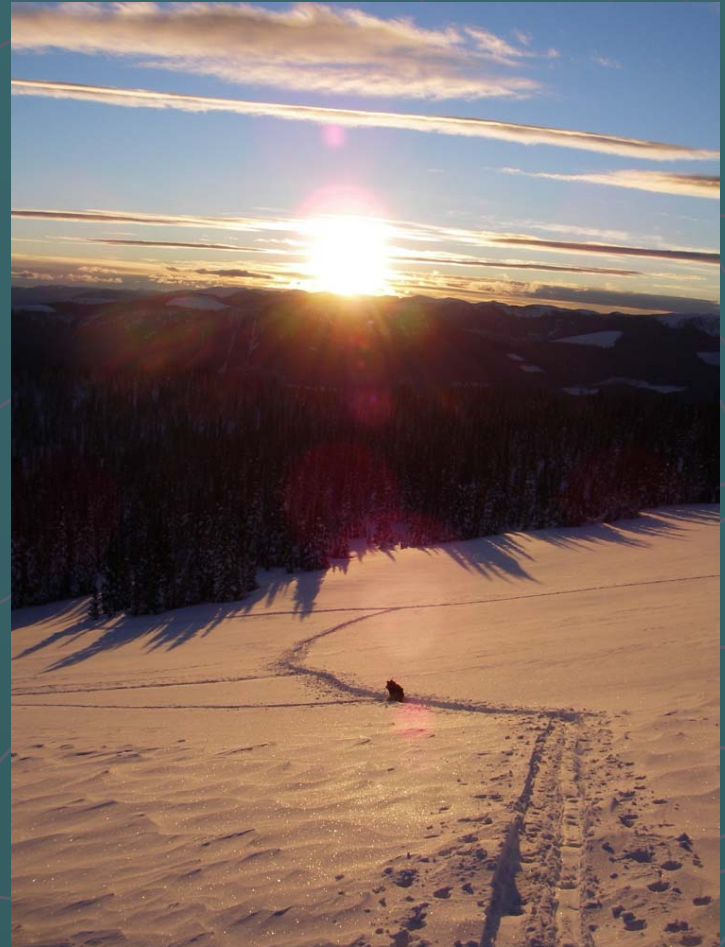
One of the most significant benefits of the wild epiphany is the apparent reduction of anger amongst youth.



# Findings: A connection

Moments in the wilderness foster connection.

Through connection reliance and dependency are realized.



# Discussion: Dependency

Wonder is called for in the moment to moment life giving that is our dependence on the places the Earth provides us. Our irreverence towards the Earth has resulted in nothing less than environmental depravity.

(Kittay & Feder, 2002, p.365)



# Discussion: Masculinity

Evidence underscore[s]  
the relationship  
between traditional  
ideas about masculinity  
and violence against  
women at the  
individual level. (Crooks, Goodall

Hughes, Jaffe, & Baker, 2007, p.220)



# Conclusion

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