

CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter presents a comprehensive synthesis of the research findings, detailing the conclusions drawn from the exploration of couples' lived experiences in adventure-based therapy (ABT). The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to future hikers, involved organizations, and counselors. The chapter also addresses the study's limitations and provides thoughtful recommendations for future research. The aim is to offer a robust understanding of the contributions of ABT to relationship dynamics and personal growth, thereby guiding future applications and investigations in this field.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study employed a narrative inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences of couples participating in adventure-based therapy (ABT) through hiking. The primary aim was to understand how such therapeutic experiences impact relationship dynamics and individual growth. The research involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three couples, each with distinct backgrounds and varying levels of hiking experience. The data gathered from these interviews were meticulously analysed using thematic analysis, leading to the identification of several key themes.

The first major theme that emerged was the enhancement of communication within the couples. Participants reported that the challenges encountered during hiking required them to communicate more effectively and openly. This improved communication was not limited to the hiking experience but extended into their daily lives, fostering a deeper understanding and connection between partners. The natural environment and the necessity to rely on each other for safety and navigation played a significant role in facilitating these communication improvements.

The second theme centred on the strengthening of relational bonds. Couples highlighted that the shared experiences of overcoming physical and emotional challenges during hikes had a profound impact on their relationship. These experiences necessitated mutual support and trust, which in turn reinforced their emotional bonds. The act of working together to navigate difficult terrain and unpredictable weather conditions required a level of cooperation that strengthened their partnership. This collaborative effort was seen as a metaphor for their broader relationship, illustrating the importance of teamwork and mutual reliance in maintaining a healthy partnership in a marriage life.

The third theme was personal growth, with participants noting significant individual development because of their participation in ABT. The physical demands of hiking pushed individuals out of their comfort zones, fostering resilience and self-confidence. Participants reported gaining new perspectives on their capabilities and limitations, which translated into greater self-awareness and personal growth. This process of self-discovery was often facilitated by the reflective opportunities provided by the natural setting, allowing individuals to process their experiences and integrate new insights into their personal and relational lives.

The study's findings align with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that concrete experiences (CE) are critical for learning and development. The hiking experiences served as concrete experiences that led to reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE) within the couple relationships. This theoretical framework helped to contextualize the transformative impact of ABT, illustrating how the experiential nature of hiking facilitated both relational and individual development.

In addition to the primary themes, the study also uncovered several sub-themes related to the challenges and benefits of ABT. Participants discussed the initial difficulties they faced, such as adjusting to the physical demands of hiking and managing logistical issues like childcare. However, these challenges were often viewed as opportunities for growth and bonding, reinforcing the positive impact of the experience. The study also highlighted the role of the natural environment in promoting mental and emotional well-being, with participants reporting feelings of tranquility and rejuvenation during and after their hikes.

Overall, this study provides a greater understanding of the lived experiences of couples in ABT. It highlights the multifaceted benefits of this therapeutic approach, emphasizing the importance of communication, mutual support, and personal growth. The insights gained from this research contribute to the broader understanding of how experiential therapies can enhance relationship dynamics and individual well-being. These findings offer valuable implications for the design and implementation of ABT programs, suggesting that such interventions can play a crucial role in fostering healthy, resilient relationships.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings from this study on the lived experiences of couples in adventure-based therapy (ABT) through hiking carry significant implications for future hikers, involved organizations, and counselors. These implications are grounded in the themes of enhanced communication, strengthened relational bonds, and personal growth identified in the study.

5.3.1 Implications towards Future Hikers

For future hikers, the study highlights the profound benefits of participating in ABT, particularly in the context of enhancing personal and relational growth. The study revealed that ABT can foster better communication, build trust, and strengthen relational bonds among couples. This is especially relevant for couples seeking to improve their relationship dynamics and personal well-being. Future hikers should be informed about these potential benefits, encouraging them to engage fully in ABT programs.

Participation in ABT requires couples to navigate physical and emotional challenges together, which can act as a microcosm for real-life relationship dynamics. This shared experience can help couples develop stronger problem-solving skills and better emotional regulation, which are crucial for handling everyday stresses and conflicts. For future hikers, understanding that these outdoor experiences can translate into long-term relational benefits might increase their motivation to participate and fully engage in ABT activities.

Moreover, future hikers should be encouraged to view these experiences not just as recreational activities but as opportunities for substantial personal growth. The physical demands of hiking can push individuals out of their comfort zones, fostering resilience, self-confidence, and a greater sense of achievement. These personal developments can have a lasting impact on an individual's overall well-being, making them better equipped to handle various life challenges.

5.3.2 Implications towards Involved Organization

Organizations offering ABT programs should recognize the positive outcomes reported by participants and use the insights provided to enhance their program design and implementation. The outcomes reported by participants highlight the importance of incorporating elements that specifically target relationship building and personal growth into ABT programs. This can enhance the overall effectiveness and appeal of these programs.

Organizations should consider creating structured environments that facilitate teamwork, effective communication, and mutual support. Training facilitators to manage group dynamics effectively and provide support during challenging moments is crucial. Facilitators who are skilled in recognizing and addressing the emotional and relational needs of participants can significantly enhance the therapeutic benefits of ABT.

Additionally, organizations should leverage the study's findings to promote ABT programs as valuable therapeutic interventions. By highlighting

the specific benefits of ABT, such as improved communication, trust-building, and personal growth, organizations can attract a broader audience. This could include not only couples but also families, individuals, and corporate groups seeking to improve team dynamics and personal development.

Organizations should also consider implementing follow-up activities and support to ensure that the benefits of ABT are sustained over time. Providing resources and guidance for participants to integrate the skills and insights gained during ABT into their daily lives can enhance the long-term impact of these programs.

5.3.3 Implications towards Counselor

For counselors, the study presents valuable implications for integrating ABT into therapeutic practices. The experiential nature of ABT allows couples to engage in real-time problem-solving and communication, which can complement and reinforce traditional therapeutic methods. Counselors can use ABT as a tool to provide clients with practical, hands-on experiences that translate therapeutic concepts into real-world applications.

Counselors should consider incorporating ABT into their practice to offer a more holistic approach to relationship therapy. By engaging clients in activities that require collaboration, mutual support, and effective communication, counselors can help couples develop and practice these skills in a natural and supportive environment. This can lead to more meaningful and lasting changes in relationship dynamics.

Furthermore, counselors should be trained in facilitating ABT sessions to ensure they can guide clients through the process effectively. Understanding the principles of experiential learning and being able to apply them in an outdoor setting is essential for maximizing the therapeutic benefits of ABT. Counselors can also benefit from collaborating with outdoor education specialists to design and implement effective ABT programs.

The study also suggests that counselors should encourage couples to view ABT as an ongoing process rather than a one-time intervention. By promoting regular engagement in adventure-based activities, counselors can help couples continuously develop and strengthen their relational skills and personal resilience. This ongoing commitment to personal and relational growth can lead to deeper, more sustained improvements in their overall well-being.

In summary, the implications of this study underscore the potential of ABT as a powerful tool for enhancing personal and relational growth. Future hikers, organizations, and counselors can all benefit from understanding and applying the insights gained from this research. By leveraging the therapeutic potential of ABT, these stakeholders can contribute to the development of healthier, more resilient individuals and relationships.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

While the study on the lived experiences of couples in adventure-based therapy (ABT) through hiking provides valuable insights, several limitations must be

acknowledged. These limitations have implications for the generalizability and robustness of the findings and highlight areas for future research to address.

One of the primary limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size. The research involved only three couples, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population. The sample lacked significant diversity in terms of demographic characteristics such as age, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and duration of the relationship. The homogeneity of the sample means that the findings may not fully capture the range of experiences and outcomes that could occur in a more diverse population.

The study's reliance on self-selected participants introduces the potential for self-selection bias. Couples who chose to participate in the study might have had particularly positive or negative experiences with ABT, influencing the overall findings. Those with neutral or less pronounced experiences might have opted out of participating, skewing the results towards more extreme perceptions of ABT's impact.

Besides, the study relies heavily on self-reported data collected through semi-structured interviews. While qualitative interviews are valuable for gaining deep insights into participants' experiences, they are also subject to various forms of bias, including recall bias and social desirability bias. Participants might have unintentionally distorted their recollections or presented themselves in a more favourable light, affecting the reliability of the data.

Other than that, the study's focus on hiking as the primary ABT activity limits the generalizability of the findings to other forms of adventure therapy. While hiking is a popular and accessible form of ABT, other activities such as rock climbing, kayaking,

or wilderness expeditions might produce different outcomes. The specific context and environment in which the therapy takes place can significantly influence the participants' experiences and the resulting benefits.

This study also captures the immediate and short-term impacts of ABT on couples' relationships and personal growth but does not provide insights into the long-term sustainability of these benefits. The lack of longitudinal data means that it is unclear whether the positive changes observed are maintained over time or if they diminish once the couples return to their regular routines.

The absence of a control group is another limitation that affects the study's ability to attribute observed changes solely to ABT. Without a comparison group of couples who did not participate in ABT, it is difficult to rule out other factors that might have contributed to the reported improvements in communication, trust, and personal growth.

The study did not extensively explore individual differences, such as personality traits, previous outdoor experience, or mental health status, which might influence participants' responses to ABT. Understanding how these factors interact with ABT can provide deeper insights into who benefits most from this type of therapy and why.

In conclusion, while this study offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of couples in ABT, these limitations highlight the need for further research to build on and refine the findings. Addressing these limitations through more rigorous and comprehensive research designs will enhance our understanding of ABT's potential and broaden its application in therapeutic contexts.

5.5 Future Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations identified in this study on the lived experiences of couples in adventure-based therapy (ABT), several recommendations for future research and practice are proposed. These recommendations aim to enhance the understanding and application of ABT for couples.

One of the key recommendations is to conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of ABT on couples' relationships and individual well-being. The current study focused on the immediate and short-term effects of ABT, but it remains unclear whether the benefits observed are sustained over time. Longitudinal research would provide valuable insights into the durability of the positive changes in communication, trust, and personal growth reported by participants. Tracking couples over an extended period would help determine if and how these benefits evolve and whether additional support or interventions are needed to maintain them.

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. The current study's limited sample size and lack of demographic diversity restrict the applicability of the results to a broader population. Including participants from various cultural backgrounds, age groups, socioeconomic statuses, and relationship durations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the different experiences and outcomes in ABT. This diversity would also help identify any specific factors that influence the effectiveness of ABT across different demographic groups.

To establish a causal relationship between ABT and the observed outcomes, future studies could employ randomized controlled trials (RCTs). By randomly

assigning participants to either an ABT group or a control group that engages in alternative activities, researchers can better isolate the effects of ABT. This methodological rigor would help rule out other factors that might contribute to improvements in communication, trust, and personal growth, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the findings. RCTs would provide robust evidence on the efficacy of ABT as a therapeutic intervention for couples.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the data, future research might want to incorporate multiple data sources and methods. The current study relied heavily on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews, which are subject to biases such as recall bias and social desirability bias. Triangulating self-reported data with other sources, such as observations, diary entries, or physiological measures such as heart rate variability and cortisol levels, would provide a more comprehensive and objective assessment of the impact of ABT. This mixed-method approach would yield richer and deeper insights into participants' experiences.

While this study focused on hiking as the primary ABT activity, future research should explore a wider variety of adventure-based activities to determine their unique contributions to therapeutic outcomes. Other adventure and outdoor activities might produce different experiences and benefits for participants. Investigating the specific elements of each activity that contribute to positive outcomes would help refine and optimize ABT programs. Understanding the impact of different environments and challenges on relational and personal growth would provide valuable guidance for designing effective ABT interventions.

Future studies also may explore the integration of ABT with other therapeutic modalities to determine the most effective combination for enhancing relationship

therapy. Combining ABT with traditional therapeutic approaches, such as reality therapy (Becker, 1997), or emotion-focused therapy might enhance the overall therapeutic impact. Research should investigate how these integrated approaches can address both the emotional and physical aspects of relationship dynamics, providing a more holistic and comprehensive treatment for couples.

Examine the role of individual differences, such as personality traits, previous outdoor experience, and mental health status, in shaping participants' responses to ABT could be studied too. Understanding how these factors interact with ABT can provide deeper insights into who benefits most from this type of therapy and why. Identifying moderators of ABT effectiveness would help tailor programs to better meet the needs of diverse participants, optimizing therapeutic outcomes.

To ensure the sustainability of the benefits gained from ABT, future research could explore the development of follow-up support and resources for participants. Providing ongoing support, such as booster sessions, online resources, or community groups, can help couples maintain and build upon the skills and insights gained during ABT. Investigating the effectiveness of various follow-up interventions would provide valuable guidance for practitioners seeking to support couples in their continued growth and development.

In summary, addressing these recommendations through more rigorous and comprehensive research designs will enhance our understanding of ABT's potential and broaden its application in therapeutic contexts. By building on the findings of this study and addressing its limitations, future research can contribute to the development of more effective and accessible ABT programs, ultimately improving the well-being of couples and strengthening their relationships.

5.6 Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of couples engaging in adventure-based therapy (ABT) through hiking, offering a deep dive into the transformative effects of such therapeutic interventions on relationship dynamics and individual growth. By employing a narrative inquiry approach, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of how shared adventure activities can influence couples' lives.

The analysis of the data revealed that ABT significantly impacts couples' communication and relational bonds. The study found that the structured challenges of hiking facilitated effective collaboration and communication, thereby fostering deeper emotional connections. Couples reported that these experiences not only enhanced their ability to communicate but also strengthened their trust and mutual support, vital components for maintaining a healthy relationship.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of ABT in promoting personal growth. Participants noted that the physical and emotional challenges of hiking pushed them to confront and overcome their limitations, leading to increased resilience and self-efficacy. The reflective nature of the hiking experience allowed individuals to gain insights into their personal strengths and weaknesses, facilitating a process of continuous self-improvement.

The findings of this study are in line with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which underscores the importance of concrete experiences in the learning process. The study demonstrated that the real-life challenges encountered during hiking served as a powerful catalyst for both relational and individual development. By engaging in these activities, couples were able to reflect on their experiences, conceptualize new relational strategies, and apply these insights in their daily lives.

However, the study's limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size and lack of demographic diversity restrict the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, and the absence of a control group limits the ability to attribute the observed changes solely to ABT. These limitations highlight the need for future research to adopt more rigorous methodologies, including larger and more diverse samples, as well as longitudinal and controlled studies to better understand the long-term and specific effects of ABT.

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the benefits of ABT for couples, emphasizing its potential to enhance communication, strengthen relationships, and promote personal growth. These findings have practical implications for the design and implementation of ABT programs, suggesting that such interventions can be an effective means of fostering healthier and more resilient relationships. By addressing the limitations identified in this study, future research can further elucidate the mechanisms through which ABT operates and expand its application to a broader range of therapeutic contexts.

Ultimately, the study contributes to a growing body of evidence supporting the use of experiential therapies in enhancing relational and individual well-being, paving the way for more innovative and effective therapeutic approaches.