

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster  
Fachbereich Psychologie & Sportwissenschaft

Master Thesis

**Adventure Therapy Effects on Self-Concept**  
**– A Meta-Analysis**

Psychology  
Master of Science

submitted by

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Münster, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016

### **Acknowledgements**

I dearly want to thank some people for supporting me:

*Philipp Doebler* – For encouraging me from the first meeting on to ask the questions that matter to me. For always believing in my abilities and naming them. For your willingness to dive into an unknown topic and support me with your experienced guiding. For answering my emails immediately, no matter how late.

*Paul Bürkner* – For generously offering your knowledge of the R environment and the statistical world to help me find the way in a jungle of numbers and variables. For taking me seriously and giving me the tools to do it myself and actually understand what I'm doing.

*Celia Gärtig* – For proofreading my work and supplying profound feedback on many levels. For helping me to see the big picture in a chaotic phase of theoretical conception.

*Prof. Dr. Holling* – For encouraging and supporting me by offering guidance when needed.

*Dr. Bennett, Dr. Minor, Dr. Tucker* – For answering my email requests for the lack of data or access to the full text.

*Prof. Dr. Lakemann* – For encouraging me by showing interest in the topic and providing some guidance during literature search.

*My friends, my house community, and my family* – For encouraging me, for helping me to rest and for showing your love.

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### **Abstract**

Prior research on adventure therapy has demonstrated its general effectiveness, but has not yet developed an evidence-based theoretical model of the underlying psychological mechanisms (Norton et al., 2014). Self-concept change has been proposed as a key driver of behavioral change through adventure therapy (Hans, 2000). This meta-analysis includes thirty studies (53 effect sizes, 1802 subjects) that report effects of adventure therapy programs on one or more of three psychological constructs concerning self-concept: locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Participants were either at risk or in treatment for behavioral or mental health issues. The short-term effect sizes of the impact of adventure therapy on self-concept were found to be moderate for both uncontrolled effects ( $g = 0.51$ ) and controlled effects ( $g = 0.56$ ). There was no evidence for a difference between the effects of adventure therapy on locus of control, self-efficacy or self-esteem. The revealed high heterogeneity of effect sizes could not be explained by any of the examined moderating variables. The follow-up effects confirmed a lasting self-concept change. No publication bias was found, but limitations and alternative explanations of the results are discussed. Future research needs to focus on psychological processes involved in adventure therapy and strive towards high methodological quality.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Die Effektivität von Erlebnistherapie (*Adventure Therapy*) wurde empirisch bestätigt, jedoch fehlt weiterhin ein validiertes theoretisches Wirkmodell (Norton et al., 2014). Die Veränderung des Selbstkonzepts spielt im Prozess der Erlebnistherapie eine zentrale Rolle (Hans, 2000). Die vorliegende Meta-Analyse umfasst 30 Studien (53 Effektstärken, 1802 Personen), welche den Effekt von Erlebnistherapie-Programmen auf die Kontrollüberzeugung (locus of control), die Selbstwirksamkeit oder den Selbstwert untersuchen. Die Versuchspersonen gehörten entweder zu einer Risikogruppe oder waren wegen auffälligem Verhalten oder psychischer Belastung in Behandlung. Erlebnistherapie zeigte eine mittlere unmittelbare Effektstärke für unkontrollierte ( $g = 0.51$ ) und kontrollierte Effekte ( $g = 0.56$ ) auf das Selbstkonzept. Es wurden keine Unterschiede zwischen Kontrollüberzeugung, Selbstwirksamkeit und Selbstwert gefunden. Die große Heterogenität der Effekte wurde von keiner der getesteten Moderatorvariablen erklärt. Die Langzeit-Effekte bestätigten eine nachhaltige Veränderung des Selbstkonzepts durch Erlebnistherapie. Es wurde kein Publikationsbias festgestellt. Einschränkungen sowie alternative Erklärungen werden diskutiert. Zukünftig bedarf es einer methodisch hochwertigen Forschung, die sich den psychologischen Prozessen in der Erlebnistherapie widmet.