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**BUSY DOING NOTHING: RESEARCHING THE PHENOMENON  
OF "QUIET TIME" IN A CHALLENGE-BASED WILDERNESS  
THERAPY PROGRAM**

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## ABSTRACT

Wilderness therapy programs are increasingly regarded as an effective alternative to more traditional forms of therapy for people identified as 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' (Gass, 1993). Despite substantial evidence to support the use of wilderness and adventure experiences to promote attitudinal and behavioural change, much remains unknown about the process of change and the experiences of participants.

The purpose of the research was to generate a grounded theory about participants' experiences of *Quiet Time* within a challenge-based wilderness therapy program. The central question to be addressed was: What is the phenomenon of *Quiet Time* from the participants' point of view and how do they use this phenomenon in a challenge-based wilderness therapy program?

A grounded theory design (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was chosen as a methodology to guide the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Sixteen male and two female participants from four Mountain Challenge wilderness therapy programs scheduled between February 2002 and February 2005 participated in the study. All but one of the participants came to the Mountain Challenge as part of ongoing therapy for drug and/or alcohol addiction. This triggered significant and particular ethical concerns that impacted on the design of the study. The exception was a female trainee facilitator who participated as all other participants and had no facilitative responsibilities. Data were collected in the form of interviews, photographs, journals, field notes and standard program documentation. An analytical framework using inductive and deductive categories was selected to analyse the data.

Based on the findings a theoretical model of the phenomenon of *Quiet Time* was deduced and a number of propositions for practice and research advanced. The research findings identify *Quiet Time* as a 'sense' of solitude that, contrary to understandings of solitude as an objective and external condition, is defined by the four co-occurring subjective and internal conditions: a sense of being alone; a positive mind frame; a personal time perspective and focussed attention. Further analysis led to an

understanding that *Quiet Time* was typically brief, participant initiated, and inclusive of experiences of "being alone together." Participants utilised *Quiet Time* as an opportunity to focus on nature, reflect, and to engage in authentic and heartfelt conversation. The outcomes of *Quiet Time* were found to impact positively on participants' immediate experience and processing of the wilderness therapy program. The study also indicates that the incidence and use of *Quiet Time* may be facilitated or constrained by a number of conditions including environmental factors, leadership styles, levels of group development and the individual needs, strengths and limitations of the participant. Among a number of outcomes found to extend beyond the duration of the program was, for some, the taking up of a habit of *Quiet Time* as a deliberate self-help and life enhancing strategy. Unexpected findings included the potential for *Quiet Time* to arouse feelings that may overwhelm and confuse participants.

One of the major contributions of the study is that it identifies *Quiet Time* as a commonly occurring, and predominately participant initiated phenomenon that has, despite its capacity to impact positively on participants' attitudes and behaviours, been largely over looked by the wilderness therapy literature. *Quiet Time* was found to differ from traditional concepts of solitude in wilderness programs in terms of its duration, how it is defined and how it is initiated. Despite its brevity the outcomes of *Quiet Time* parallel positive outcomes documented elsewhere. The main implication from this research is that the therapeutic potential of challenge-based wilderness therapy programs can be enhanced by promoting the opportunity for participant initiated *Quiet Time* through the adoption of an unhurried and process oriented approach to the wilderness adventure.