

# 2017 American Camp Association

## Research Forum Abstracts

2017

A decorative background at the bottom of the page featuring a pattern of overlapping, semi-transparent green hexagons. The hexagons are arranged in a honeycomb-like structure, with some appearing slightly offset or layered to create a sense of depth. The overall color palette is various shades of green, from light to dark.

December 8, 2016

Dear Colleagues:

This book includes 17 abstracts that will be presented at the 2017 American Camp Association (ACA) Research Forum to be held during the ACA annual conference in Albuquerque, NM from February 21-24. Twelve of these abstracts have been grouped into logical areas and will be verbally presented in four sessions. All abstracts will be on display as posters.

The Research Forum has grown in quantity and quality over the past decade. ACA's Committee for the Advancement of Research and Evaluation (CARE) has been instrumental in pushing this forum forward. Staff at ACA have been enthusiastically supportive including Amy Katzenberger and Melany Irvin. Ben Hickerson, Mary Ann Devine, and I provided peer-reviewed external evaluations for the selection of these 17 abstracts.

We look forward to presenting these papers at the 2017 Research Forum but also recognize that many people cannot attend the annual meeting. We hope these 1500-word abstracts will provide information for those not able to attend. Please contact the authors if you have further questions.

Best wishes,



2017 ACA Research Forum Coordinator

The proper way to cite these abstracts using APA is:

Author name(s). (2017). Title of abstract. *2017 American Camp Association Research Forum Abstracts* (pp. x – x). Retrieved from <http://www.....>

Example:

Bennett, T. (2017). Investigating the effects of camp program quality on outcome achievement across gender and ethnicity. *2017 American Camp Association Research Forum Abstracts* (pp. 4 - 6). Retrieved from <http://www....>

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## INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF CAMP PROGRAM QUALITY ON OUTCOME ACHIEVEMENT ACROSS GENDER AND ETHNICITY

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In society, the importance of youth having experiences in nature and developing an affective connection with nature is widely recognized (Louv, 2008). In business and higher education, individuals who are able to work together and interact well with others are often deemed to be more successful (Tough, 2012; Wagner, 2008). Camp is uniquely situated to help youth develop both connections with nature and teamwork (American Camp Association, 2005). Understanding how to more effectively achieve these outcomes can help camps to position themselves as essential partners in youth development.

### Conceptual Foundations

Youth development, conceptualized as *change*, is influenced by the characteristics of individual youth as well as the design and implementation of youth programs (Bronfenbrenner, & Morris, 2006; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Programs for youth can be intentionally designed and implemented to increase outcome achievement (Roark, Gillard, Wells, Evans, & Blauer, 2014) through recognized best practices. The ability of a program to implement these best practices is often expressed as program quality. In general, higher levels of program quality are thought to lead to increased outcome achievement (Garst, Browne & Bialeschki, 2011). To effectively target program quality improvements, camp directors need to understand how different characteristics of program quality may relate to specific developmental outcomes, and how individual characteristics of youth such as gender and ethnicity may affect these relationships. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the outcomes of Friendship Skills and Affinity for Nature across camper gender and ethnicity. Multi-level modeling was used to further investigate the relationship between camp directors' perceptions of camp program quality and camper perceptions of outcome achievement.

### Methods

A random sample of 300 ACA accredited camps was recruited to participate in an ACA research project during the summer of 2015. Camp directors were asked to administer a survey including the Youth Outcomes Battery subscales of Affinity for Nature and Friendship Skills to campers between the ages of 10-16 yrs. Camp directors were also asked to complete a program quality questionnaire to self-assess the frequency in their camp of high quality best practices identified on the Camp Program Quality Assessment (CPQA). The CPQA survey included the program quality domains of Staff Friendliness and Circulation, Emotional Safety, High Expectations and Good Challenge, Active and Cooperative Learning, Camper Voice, and Planning and Reflection.

A multi-level analysis was conducted to investigate the influence of camp program quality on the relationship between perceived change in friendship skills and affinity for nature and camper gender and ethnicity. In the multi-level analysis, camper level predictors were modeled at level 1 and camp level predictors were modeled at level 2. Level 1 of each model examined differences in outcome achievement across camper gender and camper ethnicity. At level 2, six parallel but separate models were generated for each CPQA domain.

## Results

A total of 1,667 campers from 26 camps completed surveys. Fifty-eight percent of campers indicated they were female with 67% indicating they were Caucasian, 10% Black/African American, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6% Hispanic. The average camper was 12 years old and had spent three years at camp. Camp directors at each camp completed a program quality questionnaire asking them how frequently CPQA best practices occurred at their camp.

For the outcome of friendship skills, a significant within camp effect between camper gender and change in friendship skills emerged at level-1, such that the average female camper had significantly higher perceived change in friendship skills compared to the average male camper ( $B = 4.69, p < .001$ ). At the camp level, significant cross-level interactions were found between camper gender and the CPQA domains of Emotional Safety ( $B = .09, p = .008$ ) and High Expectations & Good Challenge ( $B = .09, p = .011$ ) on Friendship Skills. A simple slopes analysis of the interaction between camper perceptions of change in Friendship Skills and camp program quality scores indicated that for female campers, perception of change in friendship skills significantly increased as camp program quality scores increased within the domains of Emotional Safety and High Expectations & Good Challenge.

For the outcome of affinity for nature, there was a significant within camp effect between campers identifying as Caucasian and campers who indicated a different ethnicity. The average camper identifying as an ethnicity other than Caucasian had significantly lower perceived change in affinity for nature ( $B = 4.25, p < .001$ ) compared to campers identifying as Caucasian. A significant cross-level interaction emerged for the CPQA domains of Active & Cooperative Learning ( $B = -.09, p < .001$ ), Emotional Safety ( $B = .095, p = .008$ ), High Expectations & Good Challenge ( $B = -.18, p = .004$ ), and Staff Friendliness & Circulation ( $B = -.15, p = .009$ ). Simple slopes analyses revealed that campers who indicated an ethnicity other than Caucasian tended to score higher on perceived change in affinity for nature at camps with lower CPQA scores in the domains of Active & Cooperative Learning, High Expectations & Good Challenge, and Staff Friendliness & Circulation. Interestingly, camper perceptions of change in affinity for nature were actually lower at camps scoring higher on program quality within these domains. In the CPQA domain of Emotional Safety, however, higher program quality scores were significantly associated with increased perceptions of change in affinity for nature amongst campers identifying as an ethnicity other than Caucasian.

### Implications for Camp Professionals

Camp professionals interested in increasing outcome achievement for specific groups of campers can use these results to intentionally target program quality improvements. Results suggest that the ability of female campers to make friends and develop relationships is increased when campers are challenged to do their best in an emotionally safe environment. Camps can intentionally design and implement challenging and emotionally safe environments using CPQA best practices. For example, the CPQA staff best practices checklist describes specific high quality staff behaviors that can be incorporated into training and program improvement efforts.

For campers from different ethnic backgrounds, an emotionally safe environment also has a significant positive effect on the development of an affinity for nature. The relationship between CPQA domains of program quality and change in affinity for nature is perplexing.

While this study is preliminary and exploratory, the findings indicate that CPQA best practices may be having a negative influence on how campers who do not identify as Caucasian perceive nature and the environment. If this is the case, the best intentions of camps to improve program quality could potentially be having a negative influence on the development of an affinity for nature amongst campers who do not identify as Caucasian. Further research and discussion is needed to help camps understand the relationships between domains of program quality and improving achievement of these important outcomes.

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## **A MINIMALLY-INTRUSIVE APPROACH TO MEASURING QUALITY OF STRUCTURED EXPERIENCES FOR YOUTH**

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Visionaries in quality management consistently asserted variations of, “if you are not measuring it, you are not managing it.” That adage is particularly notable for camps and youth-serving organizations providing nature experiences, learning activities, social events, and related structured experiences (Duerden, Ward, & Freeman, 2015). The extent to which structured experiences are engaging and valued by participants can have substantial impact on attrition and on long-term developmental outcomes. Yet, instruments currently available to measure outcomes are suited for intensive and long-term summative evaluations (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010) rather than immediate structured experiences. The availability of tools for efficiently measuring the quality of structured experiences for youth would allow youth leaders to establish goals per activity, monitor scores over time, make data-based decisions regarding program options, and evaluate strategies to enhance the situational quality of specific activities. We thus developed a brief, minimally intrusive method for measuring the quality of youths’ structured experiences.

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

Two hundred nineteen youth from 11 randomly selected 4-H clubs participated in the study. The sample was evenly divided by sex. The average age was 12.4 years.

#### **Measurement**

The questionnaire included two sets of items. One set comprised the measure of structured experience quality. The second set included questions about the program climate. These program climate items were included to evaluate criterion-related evidence of validity. The goal was to create a brief questionnaire that is minimally invasive on youths’ time, while still yielding acceptable psychometric properties. The instrument was designed for convenient administration via cell phones and electronic devices. Two scales were constructed to measure quality: perceived value (four items) and engagement (four items). Participants completed both sets of items immediately following the conclusion of structured experiences. Some used electronic questionnaires and others used paper questionnaires.

**Quality Instrument.** Perceived value was defined as youths’ degree of contentment with their decision to participate in the structured experience (Zeithaml, 1988). A sample question is, “This was an excellent use of my time.” Responses ranged from false (1) to true (5). Scores were calculated by summing the four items. Youths with high scores considered their choice to participate to be superior to other options for time use that could have been pursued; they considered their participation to be an excellent choice for their time investment. Engagement was defined as the percentage of time participants considered themselves to be active in attention and motivation during the structured experience (Reeve, 2013; Reschly & Christenson, 2013; Ridley, McWilliam, & Oats, 2000). A sample question is, “I felt excited about the things we



were doing.” Participants used a *slider scale* to respond to these items; they placed a mark on a line between two anchor points to represent their status relative to each item. Anchor points were “none of the time” and “all of the time.” Scores were derived by measuring the distance between that mark and the “none of the time” response. That distance was divided by the total length of the line, resulting in an estimate of the percentage of time during the structured experience that the youth felt engaged. A total score was calculated for each youth by summing across the four items and then dividing by four.

**Questionnaires for Validity Analyses.** If the quality instruments are appropriate for measuring the quality of structured experiences, their scores must change when the elements of program climate change. In other words, criterion-related evidence of validity of the quality measures should be reflected in correlations between our measures of program quality and the measures of program climate. As such, we included a set of *program climate* items from the 4H “Common Measures” and related sources (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lewis, Horrillo, Widaman, Worker, & Trzesniewski, 2015; Smith, Akiva, Arrieux, & Jones, 2006). We used factor analysis to group the items into two factors: supportiveness of the environment and safety of the environment. Factor scores were calculated for validity analyses.

We assessed criterion-related evidence of validity in two phases: internal- and cross-structure analysis (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). For internal structure analysis, reliability estimates of our perceived value and engagement scales were calculated using Cronbach’s Alpha. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between perceived value and engagement. Phase two involved examination of relations between scores on these two measures and two program climate factors representing the 4H Pyramid of Program Quality (Smith et al., 2006). We constructed two multiple regression models. Engagement and perceived value were each regressed on the two factor scores (i.e., supportive environment and safe environment) and a product-vector representing their interaction effect.

## Results

**Internal Structure Analysis.** Results are summarized in Table 1. Cronbach’s alpha estimates for Perceived Value and Engagement were .82 and .71, respectively. The mean of the Engagement scale items indicated that youths reported being engaged during approximately 69% of the time of their structured experiences. Substantial variation in engagement was noted ( $SD = 22\%$ ). The average of the means of the perceived value items was 4.41 ( $SD = .77$ ). Recall that a five-point scale was used. Youths thus rated the value of their experiences very high. The correlation between perceived value and engagement was positive, significant, and moderately strong, as predicted:  $r = .52$  ( $p < .01$ ).

**Cross Structure Analysis.** Results of the regression analyses supported criterion-related validity (see Table 1). Relations were positive, moderate in strength, and significant. The two models support validity of inferences that can be made from the measures of perceived value and engagement. A plot of the significant interaction effect in the perceived value model revealed that the relation between engagement and perceived value is stronger when the environment has a higher degree of perceived safety.

## Summary and Implications

This study sought to develop minimally invasive indicators of quality of structured experiences for youths. Results indicate that four-item measures of perceived value and

engagement can be used for that purpose. Additional validation work would be appropriate as would evaluation of social validity (i.e., efficiency and usefulness to camp and youth leaders). A study addressing social validity is in progress.

We anticipate primary users to be administrators of youth organizations that hold regular meetings for participants, such as 4H clubs and scout organizations. The instrument also, though, has significant potential for evaluating specific programs within camps. Perhaps, for example, a camp manager might wish to measure quality of specific programs youths attend over multiple sessions (e.g., archery, equestrian, sailing, crafts). The measures of perceived value and engagement are minimally invasive (i.e., brief and easy to administer) and may be administered either electronically or by paper and pencil for that purpose. The program experience quality measure has good potential application to residential camp and day camp contexts as well.

**Table 1**

Regression Results

Scale	Supportive Environment (S)		Unsafe Environment (U)		S by U Interaction		$R^2$
	<i>beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>t</i>	
Perceived Value	.25	4.01*	-.28	-4.39*	.14	3.20*	.18
Engagement	.53	9.11*	-.16	-2.76*	<.01	-.02	.30

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## EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OVERPARENTING AND THE CAMP EXPERIENCE

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Parents play a key role their children's "leisure activity choices, leisure values, and their ideas about roles that leisure time and activities play throughout their lives" (Shannon, 2006, pp. 413-414). In this role parents act as a gatekeeper to their child's leisure and recreation conditioned upon the benefits and/or risks the parent associates with participation (or non-participation) of their child in a particular leisure or recreation activity (Chait-Barnett & Gareis, (2006); Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005). This parental influence can directly affect a child's current and later social, emotional, and physical health (Alderman, Benham-Deal, & Jenkins, 2010; Holman & Epperson, 1989; Scott & Willits, 1989). Parental concerns about the safety of their child's leisure-time experiences may also influence the types of recreation or leisure in which parents allow or encourage their children to participate (Prezza, Alparone, Cristallo, & Luigi, 2005). For example, in a study exploring the relationships between outdoor play, parental attitudes, and play opportunities Valentine and McKendrick (1994) found that availability of play facilities did not influence rates of child play, but parental worries about the spaces being safe did negatively influence rates of child play. Supporting this finding, McFarland, Hammon, Zajicek, and Waliczek (2011) found that "although parents are aware of the multitude of benefits of outdoor play...the amount of time children spent in outdoor play was directly related to concerns for their children being exposed to traffic, strangers, injuries, and other outdoor hazards" (p. 225). This parental worry seems to stem not only from these perceived risks, but also from increasing parental concern about separation from their children (Munich & Munich, 2009; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), particularly for extended periods of time (Garst & Gagnon, 2015). Within this expanding context of parental worry, parenting typologies appear to be shifting, with approaches emerging that reflect increasing levels of parental effort, control, and monitoring (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanah, 2012).

Over the past decade, a distinct parenting approach has appeared emphasizing excessive parental control, involvement, and monitoring. Labelled *overparenting* (or helicopter parenting in popular culture and in some of the extent literature), this parenting style has been defined as "the application of developmentally inappropriate levels of parental directiveness, tangible assistance, problem-solving, monitoring, and involvement in the lives of children" (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013, p. 569). The central idea behind overparenting is that parents display these behaviors in a misguided attempt to improve their child's current and future success (Locke et al., 2012) or to protect them from real or perceived harm (Segrin et al., 2013). Simply put, an *overparent* is high in control, high in involvement, high in worry, and high in warmth/support as compared to more normative parents. This non-normative parenting style may result in limits on children's leisure and recreation experiences, particularly when parents act as gatekeepers of their child's experiences to minimize the perceived risks to their child (Hood-Williams, 1990).

Although there is general agreement within the limited research and literature that overparenting negatively contributes to socio-emotional outcomes in children (Locke et al., 2012), this research has been conducted almost entirely on college-aged students. Thus, there may be a gap in an understanding of how overparenting influences youth within multiple contexts, including leisure and recreation settings such as camp (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011).

Given these opportunities, the purpose of this study was to develop, test, and validate a measure of overparenting and to examine its relationship with five common developmental outcomes of the residential camp experience for youth ages 9 - 16 years.

### **Method**

In partnership with a mid-Atlantic state-level youth serving organization operating five residential camps, parents of campers were solicited via email (and a reminder one week thereafter) to complete a 121-item online survey one week after their child's camp experience. The combination of the two emails and an incentive (i.e., entry to win a \$100 gift card) resulted in a total sample of 388 parents of children ages 9-16 years indicating a 23% response rate. Data were analyzed in EQS 6.3 software for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure the validity and reliability of the scales and structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore potential relationships between *overparenting* and *Camp Skill Developmental outcomes* (CSD). The survey included items related to overparenting and parent perceptions of outcomes.

*Overparenting* was operationalized as parenting behaviors that are overly controlling, overly-involved, and highly focused on solving their child's problems. Sample questions (adapted from Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012 and measured on a 7-point scale) included, "I make important decisions for my child" and "I manage most important decisions in my child's life." Parent perceptions of outcomes were operationalized as parental attitudes towards changes in skills (e.g., communication, cooperation, responsibility and self-regulation) demonstrated by their children and attributed to their child's participation in residential camp based upon the parental perceptions of developmental outcomes measured by Baughman, Garst, and Fuhrman (2009). Specifically, 17 of the items in the researchers' original measure were used along with five additional items that better reflected the current literature on the developmental outcomes of camp experiences. These items were used to create the *Camp Skill Development Scale*.

### **Results**

The final overall goodness-of-fit indices suggested that the proposed six-factor pre-camp measurement model fit the data well:  $\chi^2(204) = 702.004, p \leq .001$ , RMSEA = .073 (90% CI, .067-.078), CFI = .938. Reliability of factors was further indicated by Cronbach's alphas ranging from .798 to .931 and relatively low between factor correlations ( $r \leq .43$ ). After reliability and validity of the measurement model was determined an SEM was used to explore the relationship between overparenting and pre and post camp outcomes. The results indicated good fit for the structural model as evidenced by the overall goodness-of-fit indices:  $\chi^2(1,556) = 3,070.513, p \leq .001$ , RMSEA = .054 (90% CI .051-.057), CFI = .903. Overparenting scores had a significant negative direct effect on four of five skills measured: communication (-.066,  $p \leq .001$ ), self-regulation (-.073,  $p \leq .001$ ), attitude (-.076,  $p \leq .001$ ), and exploration (-.071,  $p \leq .001$ ).

### **Discussion and Implication to Practice**

The study findings suggested overparenting may influence parental perceptions of their child's camp experience and growth. As a majority of the limited overparenting research is confined to higher-education settings, this study was one of the first to examine overparenting in a sample of parents of upper-elementary and middle-school aged youth. Furthermore, this study provided an overparenting measure tested and validated for use in residential camp settings, a setting in which overparenting appears to be prevalent (Garst & Gagnon, 2015; Garst, Gagnon, & Bennett, 2016). As parents scored greater in overparenting they were also more likely to identify greater deficits in developmental outcomes (based on the pre-test scores) than parents who scored lower in overparenting. A more comprehensive understanding of overparenting behaviors in recreational and leisure contexts, may help camp professionals understand how to

tailor parent outreach to alleviate or mitigate overparenting behaviors. Additionally, the findings suggest that overparenting may have a power influence within recreational settings, as evidenced by its expression in the large statewide sample of camp parents in this study. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the results of this study suggest that overparenting does have a meaningful negative influence on the parental perceptions of youth outcomes associated with leisure and recreation programs. These findings provide further evidence for the challenges associated with overparenting and correspondingly the potentially negative effects that children of an overparent may experience. Moreover, the potential stifling of socio-emotional skills could have effects on later-in-life growth for the child of an overparent and thus, broader societal consequences.

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## **DOES EXTRA STAFF TRAINING ON CAMPER FRIENDSHIP SKILLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO CAMPER OUTCOMES?**

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This study investigated if campers' self-reported friendship skills changed from a summer when staff received a 45-minute training about camper friendship skills to the next summer when staff attended a 90-minute training plus a mid-summer booster session. Findings from this study could be used to make decisions about the amount of camp staff training on camper friendship skills. The setting for this study was a seven-day residential recreational camp serving children with serious illnesses (e.g., cancer, sickle cell, HIV/AIDS, metabolic disease, and other serious illnesses) and their siblings. One thousand and forty-seven campers completed the friendship skills scale in both summers.

The 2016 study builds on a 2015 study that showed camper friendship skills were higher during a summer when staff participated in a 45-minute friendship skills-specific training session compared to the previous year when staff did not have any friendship skills-specific training (Gillard & Roark, 2016). While it was important that staff training mattered to camper friendship skills, what was still unclear was *how much* training would matter.

Other fields outside of camp and recreation have examined employee training duration. For example, Schwalbe, Oh, and Zweben (2014) found that five hours of contact time over six months was sufficient to maintain motivational interviewing training effects. A study of emergency physicians found that a short training provided basic skill proficiency and a longer training led to advanced skill proficiency (Chisholm et al., 2013). In a systematic review and meta-analysis of research on communication in oncology, no clear cut-off for duration for efficacious training courses could be determined, and the researchers suggested, "the trade-off between feasibility and efficacy has to be borne in mind," (Barth & Lannen, 2011, p. 1,035). More information on training length and its effects on participant outcomes is needed for the camp context.

Friendship skills is a youth development outcome defined by the American Camp Association as making friends and maintaining relationships (2011). The experience of serious illness and disability can greatly affect friendships with other youth (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2015). Still, recreation and leisure experiences can support friendships, social connectedness, and belonging for children and youth with disabilities (Powrie, Kolehmainen, Turpin, Ziviani, & Copley, 2015).

While there is some published research using ACA's friendship scale (e.g., Martiniuk et al., 2014; Roark, Gillard, Evans, Wells, & Blauer, 2012), and some research on employee training program lengths, less is known about how the length of staff training might influence campers' friendship skills. The purpose of this study was to explore if campers' self-reported friendship skills changed from a summer when staff received a 45-minute training about camper friendship skills to the next summer when staff attended a 90-minute training plus a mid-summer booster session.



## Theoretical Framework

Developmental Systems Theory (DST) was used in this study to consider the interactions between campers and their context in camp. In DST, the systems in which campers are embedded likely affect their development. Youth development involves changing relations between developing youth and their shifting systems, and acknowledges that youth grow as part of a larger social context (Lerner & Castellino, 2002). A key element of DST is the fit between activities and experiences that are developmentally appropriate, interesting, engaging, and provide support via interactions with caring others and opportunities for building skills.

In DST, youth thrive when their strengths align with ecological resources in their context (Lerner et al., 2014). For example, changing the adults in the camp system by influencing adults' knowledge and attitudes through training could affect campers within that system. Staff-level intentional outcomes training has been linked to youth-level effects (Galloway, Bourdeau, Arnold, & Nott, 2013; Roark et al., 2012). For this study, we intervened in the camp system by increasing staff training from 45 to 90 minutes and added a 20-minute mid-summer booster training, and examined if those interventions had any effect on the developmental outcome of camper friendship skills.

## Methods

The first author designed and delivered a 45-minute training about friendship skills to summer staff during orientation in June 2015. In June 2016, a representative from Yale University's Center for Emotional Intelligence delivered a 90-minute training on friendship skills and the first author delivered a 20-minute booster session after the third session of the eight-session camp season. Thus, the treatments were (a) 45-minute session, (b) 90-minute session, and (c) 90-minute session plus booster session.

Parent or caregiver consent was obtained for campers to participate in evaluation activities in 2015 and 2016. Campers, aged 10-15 years, completed the friendship skills survey on their last full day at camp: 467 campers in 2015, and in 2016 there were 236 campers before and 339 after the booster session.

Camper data for all three time points were analyzed using descriptive statistics and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Differences between trainings were tested using procedures with the following hypothesis,  $H_0: \mu_{\text{extra train+booster}} = \mu_{\text{extra train}} = \mu_{\text{train}}$ . The covariate included was age. Means, standard deviations, and strength of relationship statistics were calculated. Homogeneity of variance assumptions was tested.

## Results

The test between a 45-minute, 90-minute, and 90-minute plus 20-minute booster training ( $N = 1,047$ ) was not significantly different ( $F_{1, 1047} = .07, p = .94$ ). Descriptive statistics indicated the adjusted friendship mean for the 45-minute ( $M = 2.2, SD = .82$ ), 90-minute ( $M = 2.18, SD = .81$ ) and 90-minute with booster ( $M = 2.19, SD = .81$ ) were all effective in increasing camper friendship skills. Levene's test did not reject the hypothesis that group variances were equal for friendship skills ( $F = .088, p = .92$ ).

Table 1

ANCOVA for the Effect of 45 Minute vs. 90 Minute vs. Booster Trainings on Friendship Skills.

	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta_p^2$
Corrected Model	.217	3	.072	.07	.97	<.001
Age	.087	1	.087	.09	.77	<.001
Training Length	.126	2	.063	.07	.94	<.001

$R^2 < .001$ (Adjusted  $R^2 = .003$ )

### Camp Applications

This study provided evidence that each length of intentional training affected camper outcomes and informs us that the same goal for camper outcomes can be reached using varying lengths of training. Adding to the growing literature on training interventions and youth outcomes, this study contradicted conventional wisdom and previous research showing that skills developed during the course of traditional training workshops erode quickly when additional post-workshop training inputs are not provided (Schwalbe et al., 2014). Perhaps there is a saturation point for learning how to support campers' friendship skills.

Understanding the effectiveness of training interventions of different lengths can inform how camps allocate training time and resources for different topics. While many camps aim to provide mid-summer booster sessions, this study showed that it might not be necessary to deliver additional friendship skills training and camps could use that time for other topics. While additional training did not decrease campers' friendship skills, it did not enhance them either, so camps can choose how much staff training on this topic to provide, with the assurance that some intentional training is likely to have an effect on campers. There might be other elements besides staff training that are embedded within the camp context that more strongly influence camper friendship skills.

Several implications exist for future research. This study could be replicated with another outcome variable from ACA's Youth Outcomes Battery to see if different training lengths affect other camper outcomes, or with other populations. Moving beyond *quantity* and examining the *quality* of training elements such as fidelity, the amount of experiential or didactic content, or other measures can further explicate the relations between staff-level variables and camper outcomes. Finally, future research could examine other aspects of camp culture besides staff training that might promote camper friendships skills.

Many camps aim to promote friendship skills or other positive youth development outcomes. Trained staff is one element in the developmental system of campers. Camps should continue to contemplate staff training and other elements that lead to camper outcomes, and adjust those elements to maximize campers' developmental experiences.

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## **TEEN STAFF EXPERIENCES IN CALIFORNIA 4-H CAMPS**

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In 4-H camps, teen staff are a critical component in planning and implementing programs. As staff, teens have opportunities to develop leadership skills and form relationships with the adults with whom they partner. We know that the teen staff experience is different than that of campers in that teens reported greater outcomes on the ACA Youth Outcomes Battery (American Camp Association, 2005; Bird, Borba, & Nathaniel, 2014) and Developmental Supports and Opportunities (American Camp Association, 2006; Bird et al., 2008). The purpose of this study was to learn about the skills that teens developed as a teen staff member for 4-H overnight camps, specifically leadership and youth-adult partnerships.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Evaluation of the 4-H camp experience has focused on outcomes such as affinity for nature, responsibility (e.g., Bird et al., 2014), and engagement (Ferrari & Arnett, 2012). While there has been some research on leadership skills developed as a result of being a teen camp counselor (e.g., Garst & Johnson, 2005), past work focused more on the personal development component (e.g., self-awareness). Our study focused on group dynamic components (e.g., leading group discussions) and skill building (e.g., program planning). Our study also explored the relationship between the teen staff and their adult partners. Youth-adult partnership is a cornerstone of 4-H programming and research has shown the importance of these relationships in youth development (e.g., Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). Understand teens' perspective on the development of these relationship is important to ensure that adult partners are providing teens with the support and guidance to help them be successful in their teen staff role.

### **Methods**

Data was collected from 172 4-H teen staff in nine 4-H Camps in California. Sixty-six percent were female, and the average age was 15.49 years (range was 13 – 19 years). At the end of camp, teens completed a short survey about their experience as a staff member. This included seven leadership skills rated on a 1 = no ability to 4 = excellent ability scale, in a retrospective pre-post format. Example items include “I can lead group discussions” and “I can teach others.” Table 1 presents all items from this measure. Teens also reported on 10 youth-adult partnership indicators, rated on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. We asked these questions in a post-program only format. Table 2 presents the 10 items used to measure this partnership. Additionally, teens responded to four open-ended questions such as “What was the most important skill you developed as a teen staff?”

### **Results**

For each of the seven leadership skills, we ran paired t-tests to compare teen ratings on their abilities before and after camp. Teens reported significantly higher on all seven skills ( $p < .001$ ) at the close of camp. See Table 1 for retrospective pre-and post-means.

Means for each the 10 youth-adult partnership indicators were 3.00 or over, indicating that teens reported positive youth-adult partnerships. Areas for improvement included receiving recognition and rewards for efforts, and having adults provide teens with feedback. Table 2 presents the mean scores for each indicator.

Table 1. Pre and post-means and standard deviations for Leadership Skills

Skill	Retrospective Pre-Mean (SD)	Retrospective Post-Mean (SD)	Mean Difference (SD)
I can lead group discussions	2.80 (0.89)	3.45 (0.68)	0.64 (0.75)
I can work as a team member	3.12 (0.72)	3.65 (0.57)	0.54 (0.67)
I can speak before a group	2.95 (1.00)	3.56 (0.66)	0.61 (0.81)
I can see things objectively	2.94 (0.80)	3.49 (0.61)	0.55 (0.64)
I can plan programs	2.67 (0.91)	3.32 (0.78)	0.65 (0.73)
I can teach others	2.93 (0.85)	3.55 (0.62)	0.63 (0.78)
I can share my opinion with adults	2.98 (0.87)	3.52 (0.69)	0.54 (0.79)

Table 2. Means and standard deviation for youth-adult partnership indicator

Indicator	Mean (SD)
There were dedicated adults who supported me as a teen staff	3.38 (0.71)
I received training on how to be a teen staff before the program began	3.35 (0.71)
I received ongoing training and support throughout the program	3.33 (0.73)
The program made sure I had everything I needed to be successful as a teen staff	3.37 (0.75)
I received recognition and reward for my efforts	3.05 (0.84)
I participated in team-building with other teen staff in the program	3.37 (0.72)
I felt "set-up" for success by adults running the program	3.23 (0.81)
I received feedback on how well I was doing as a teen staff	3.14 (0.87)
I experienced a successful youth-adult partnership	3.26 (0.82)
I can work successfully with younger youth	3.68 (0.59)

From the open-ended questions, teens reported becoming more responsible, and learning leadership and communication skills as a result of their teen staff experience. They enjoyed the interaction and connection with peers and younger youth and the opportunities to lead, and reported that they would like to improve communication and interaction with the adult staff. Table 3 presents the most common responses for each question.

Table 3. Responses from open-ended questions.

Question	Most Common Responses
What was the most important skill you developed as a teen staff?	Leadership, Communication
How do you feel you have changed as a result of being a teen staff?	Confidence, Responsibility, Leadership
What was the best part of participating as a teen staff in this program?	Interaction, Leadership, Connection
What could be done to make your experience as a teen staff even better?	Nothing, Communication, Staff-Interaction

### Implications

This evaluation is one of the first to examine the skills teens developed in their role as camp staff. Results showed that teens reported increases in key leadership abilities. Teens articulated the skills they learned and how they changed as a result of their role. Further, teens in this study felt that they had positive youth-adult partnerships, and received ample training for their role. One might hypothesize youth skill development may be correlated with adult support, and this speaks to the importance of positive relationship between teens and their adult partners, as well as ample training and preparation for teen staff.

Information from this evaluation is useful not just for 4-H camps utilizing teens as staff, but any camp offering teen leadership experiences as part of their program. It informs adult camp staff on how teens perceived their growth in camp leadership experiences; for youth, and parents/guardians, it validates camp teen leadership roles as skill development opportunities. The study also offers teens' perspective to camp administrators who provide youth leadership opportunities at camps. Future research includes digging deeper into understanding how teens view elements of youth-adult partnerships. If youth do not feel that they are being recognized for their efforts, what type of recognition were they expecting? Similarly, what sort of feedback did they receive, and what would they have liked to receive? Examining the relationship between the staff experience and their sense of support would lead to better understanding what to emphasize in training or with the adults that partner with teens. Asking teens to explain their thoughts can help understand their perspective to strengthen teen staff programming.

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## **SUMMER CAMP STAFF: A REAL JOB WITH REAL WORLD IMPLICATIONS**

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It has long been known that summer camp staff benefit from their training and experiences at summer camp. Camp staff emerge from their summer feeling more confident, and with skills in resolving conflict, taking initiative, and communication (McClain, 2014). Staff experiences and training builds self-efficacy that acts as a positive by-product for camp staff (James, 2003), and the transfer of the skills learned at summer camp to taking the lead in a job even when co-workers had the same responsibilities (Digby & Ferrari, 2007).

For current employers, members of the workforce need to enter into the workplace with certain skills already learned; employers need workers who are skilled in communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and applying knowledge in real world settings (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Employers are also focused on “innovation as critical to the success of their companies and are giving priority to hiring employees with intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help them contribute to innovation in the workplace” (Hart Research Associates, 2015, p 4).

Social cognitive career theory suggests that learning experiences contribute to self-efficacy expectations in the formation of career expectations. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations influence future career interests, goals, and actions. The summer camp environment sets clear workplace outcome expectations through training and evaluation processes, and can strongly influence skills and competencies future employers seek.

This study quantified four workplace competencies sought by employers within the context of summer camp staff training.

### **Methods**

The study used a pre- and post-test skills indicator self-rating model, based on the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts Summer Camp Staff Development tool, as a framework for the development of the measures along with the “Are You Career Ready” Professional Competency Self-Assessment Tool (National Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2015). Using these resources, four competencies taught at staff training and matching employer sought workplace competencies were measured via the skill indicators tool (see Table 1). For each skill indicator measure, staff self-indicated their level of skill on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = This seems really hard to do; 2 = I’d really like to learn to do this; 3 = I try to do this, and I am getting better at it; 4 = I am an expert in theory, but I need more practice; and 5 = I have ninja level skills at this. In addition, staff evaluations completed by supervisors measuring the same set of skills were used for comparison to self-assessments.

The pre- and post-tests were offered to staff at four resident camps and six day camps online. The pre-test was offered before staff training began, and the post-test was offered during the last week of summer camp. Participation was optional for staff who were 18 years and over and who gave their online consent to participate. Participant identification was confidential and used only to match pre- and post-tests.

Table 1

<b>Competency:</b>	<b>Skill Indicator measure (Pre and Post):</b>
<b>Solve problems</b> with people whose views are different from their own	I seek opportunities to get to know everyone I make time to discuss logistical or other relevant issues with others I bring up issues in a respectful manner and at appropriate times I know my own work style and recognize it may differ from others' I look past conflicts once they are resolved and move on, and help others to do the same
<b>Teamwork Skills</b>	I help others to work through mental, emotional, or physical limits in order to bring out their best work I take initiative and encourage others to do so as well I initiate and facilitate collaboration between staff members I recognize my own strengths, as well as those of others, and help everyone use their strengths to their fullest I recognize my areas of weakness and seek feedback & coaching in how to strengthen them
<b>Apply knowledge to</b> real world situations	I am proactive in bringing up impending changes or potential problems I see I implement innovative ideas to improve both old and new activities I anticipate needs and adapt to changing situations with positivity I plan ahead to get supplies, directions, or other requisitions turned in on time
<b>Critical thinking</b>	I work to find reasonable solutions and compromises as situations arise I work to identify the true source of a problem I recognize and value varied perspectives when making decisions I am focused on the mental, physical, & emotional safety of everyone at camp-including myself I am thoughtful of words and actions and use caution when making decisions

One hundred and thirty seven staff participated in the pre-test (77 resident, 60 day) and 50 staff participated in the post-test (25 resident, 25 day). Demographic data collected included workplace (day or resident camp), number of summers worked at summer camp, age, education level, if this was the first summer on staff, and future career aspiration. Analysis of the two groups (i.e., day staff and resident staff) revealed an equal breakdown of years of experience and percentage of first time staff, with resident camp staff being slightly older overall than day camp staff (resident camp  $M = 25.24$  years; day camp  $M = 23.24$  years).

### **Results**

Pre- and post-test scores were compared for each competency overall, as well as for each skill indicator measure within the competencies. Day and resident camp staff were compared as separate groups. Only results that showed statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) are reported.



Most prominent findings were among staff in the resident camps. All four of the competency measures showed statistically significant increases in mean scores for the resident camp staff when comparing pre-test scores with post-tests (see Table 2).

For the day camps, Teamwork as a measure overall was significant. For Problem Solving individual skill indicator measures showed increases: “I make time to discuss logistical or other relevant issues with other staff” from Problem Solving ( $M$  pre = 3.80,  $M$  post = 4.24). From Apply Knowledge, these results were found: “I implement innovative ideas to improve both old and new activities” ( $M$  pre = 3.70,  $M$  post = 4.24), and “I plan ahead to get supplies, directions, or other requisitions turned in on time” ( $M$  pre = 4.02  $M$  post = 4.48).

Further testing showed that first year staff made statistical gains ( $p < .05$ ) in specific skill indicators, although not in overall measures. See Table 3.

**Table 2**

<b>Resident Camp</b>	Pre	Post
Problem Solving	3.87	4.42
Teamwork	3.68	4.36
Apply Knowledge	3.88	4.41
Critical Thinking	3.96	4.46
<b>Day Camp</b>		

<b>Table 3: First Year Staff</b>		Pre	Post
Teamwork	I initiate and facilitate collaboration among all staff members	3.10	4.42
Teamwork	I recognize my own strengths as well as those of others, and help everyone use their strengths to the fullest	3.55	4.42
Teamwork	I recognize my own areas of weakness and seek feedback and coaching in how to strengthen them	3.40	4.28
Problem Solving	I make time to discuss logistical or other relevant issues with other staff	3.50	4.71
Critical Thinking	I am focused on the mental, physical, and emotional safety of everyone at camp, including myself	4.00	4.71

## Discussion

This study showed that staff training and experience within summer camp had an impact on the real world skills employers are looking for – problem solving, teamwork, applied knowledge, and critical thinking, especially for staff in the resident camp setting. Within these competencies, an innovation skill indicator was directly measured and found to be significant within both the day and resident camps. Camp staff who participated in training and the work experience at camp were better prepared to enter the workforce with skills beyond their field of study, and which were sought by employers. While results were not as strong for staff participating in their first year of summer camp training, most of the first year staff were not likely to move from their first summer camp staff experience directly to the workforce. Over time, the results were stronger, as was the likelihood that many camp staff were preparing to transition to the workforce.

## Implications

Based on the results of this study, the camp staff training and experience competencies can be applied to multiple venues that strengthen the argument that camp is a real job, one which adds value to the world of employment. Camps are able to lean on the apparent strength of the training and camp experiences to collaborate with businesses, two and four year colleges, and

high schools to make the connection from summer camp to workforce. To promote the connection to the workforce skills, camps should consider the introduction of a training component that enables staff to create a portfolio outlining the knowledge and skills gained in the camp training and workplace that are sought by employers. Camps might broaden their impact in creating a future workforce by marketing camp training modules as workplace development retreats or learning sessions, offering informal training sessions (i.e., brown bag lunches) to outdoor groups or clubs at local high schools as well as two and four year colleges, and formal training opportunities for local school and businesses or after school programs for staff development.

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## **A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH TO CAPTURE THE BENEFITS OF DISEASE SPECIFIC SUMMER CAMPS**

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Advances in medical care over the past 25 years have improved life-expectancy and quality of life for children with chronic and/or life-threatening illnesses. However, many *normal* childhood activities, such as overnight summer camp, are still not feasible due to required medical care. Thus, disease specific summer camps (DSSC) allow children with chronic and/or life-threatening illnesses to “just be kids” in a medically-safe environment. A growing body of literature has also shown that DSSC provide psychological and social benefits for campers, including positive changes to disease knowledge and social interactions ( Epstein, Stinson, & Stevens, 2005; Moola, Faulkner, White, & Kirsh, 2014). In addition to having fun, these camps allow for children to compare themselves with other children, which can normalize the child’s illness experience, and provide a form of social support they may not otherwise have access to (Meltzer & Rourke, 2005; Wu, Geldhof, Roberts, Parikshak, & Amylon, 2013).

However, while the number of studies examining the psychosocial benefits of DSSC has grown over the past 10 years, only a limited number of factors that contribute to well-being and health-related quality of life have been considered. Thus additional work is needed that considers novel areas of well-being and health-related quality of life (HRQOL), including positive affect (i.e., positive or rewarding affective experiences, including pleasure, joy, elation, engagement, and excitement) and meaning and purpose (i.e., hopefulness, optimism, and goal-directedness).

Although quantitative research approaches are valuable in the outcome data they provide, it is important to consider that validated questionnaires tap constructs important to camp planners and researchers. In addition, there is also great value in allowing campers to provide feedback about their experiences using a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews with campers can help capture campers’ perspectives on why camp is meaningful as well as identify mechanisms that help explain why campers benefit from DSSC. Together this data may assist camp directors in planning age and disease specific programming.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the benefits of disease specific summer camps for children with chronic and/or life-threatening illnesses. A mixed-methods approach was utilized to capture quantitative changes to well-being and HRQOL, and to directly ask campers to describe their thoughts and experiences at and after camp.

### **Quantitative Study**

A longitudinal research design was used to quantitatively measure changes in subjective well-being before camp, 1-week post-camp, and 3-months post-camp. Our hypothesis was that after a week of DSSC, campers would report positive changes in positive affect, meaning and purpose in life, and peer relationships. Based on results from previous studies, we expected these benefits would not be maintained three months after camp.

In 2015, 37 campers completed questionnaires before and after camp through REDCap, a secure web-based survey application. Participants were ages 11 to 17 years ( $M = 13.3$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ); 59% female; and 81% Caucasian, 5% African American, 14% multi-racial, and 11% reporting Hispanic ethnicity. Campers attended one of three sessions: a) children with cancer/tumors ( $n =$

10) or sickle cell disease ( $n = 2$ ); b) kidney disease/transplant ( $n = 9$ ); or c) crohn's or colitis disease ( $n = 2$ ), celiac disease ( $n = 9$ ), or liver disease/transplant ( $n = 5$ ).

Campers completed the Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) item banks for positive affect, meaning and purpose, and peer relationships. PROMIS item banks are brief (8 items each), and include highly reliable and precise measures of HRQOL that are not disease specific (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2014).

Twenty-five of the 37 campers (68%) completed the 3-month follow-up survey. There were no demographic differences between those who did and did not complete the 3-month survey. Campers reported more positive affect, meaning and purpose in life, and peer relationships 1-week after camp. Although the mean for all campers showed that positive changes were not maintained 3-months after camp, for campers with kidney disease/transplant, improvements in positive affect and peer relationships were maintained 3-months after camp.

### Qualitative Study

Semi-structured interviews were used to qualitatively capture campers' perspectives on the benefits of attending a DSSC. Campers were asked about what they saw as the benefits of attending camp; how camp affects their mood, goals, and peer interactions, as well as their daily life during the year; and ways that camp could help maintain these benefits through the year.

Two major theories were used to guide the thematic analysis. First, *Social Comparison Theory* proposes that individuals compare themselves with others in order to judge their own emotions and abilities. DSSC provided a more realistic comparison group (i.e., other children with illness) for campers, which may allow for positive social comparisons. Second, Erikson's *Psychosocial Development Theory* was used to provide a framework for identity development, including self-efficacy, hopefulness, and security. This theory captured how DSSC may contribute to the social and emotional development of children with illness.

In 2015, 29 returning campers completed semi-structured interviews at camp during cabin clean-up or rest time. Participants were ages 11 to 17 years ( $M = 13.9$ ,  $SD = 1.9$ ); 59% female; and 52% Caucasian, 24% African American, 3% Asian, 21% multi-racial, and 10% reporting Hispanic ethnicity. Campers attended one of four sessions: a) asthma ( $n = 6$ ); b) children with cancer/tumors ( $n = 5$ ); c) kidney disease/transplant ( $n = 5$ ); or d) crohn's or celiac disease ( $n = 3$ ) or liver disease/transplant ( $n = 5$ ). Five campers who participated in the quantitative study also participated in the qualitative study.

The most common benefit of camp identified was self-efficacy, with campers stating that camp "*gives you that sense of confidence*" (17y, F, asthma) or "*[camp] makes me feel like I can do anything*" (12y, F, asthma). The second greatest benefit was emotional support, with campers reporting that "*[other campers] understand me...and know how I feel*" (13y, M, liver transplant) or "*everyone [at camp] is really accepting and supportive*" (17y, F, liver transplant). Social comparisons were made by 23 campers, including "*[At camp] we're not different. We have to take medicine*" (16y, F, liver transplant) and "*[You] can feel more at home than...at school...because everybody has kind of gone through the same thing*" (14y, F, kidney disease). Seventeen campers identified having a positive mood at camp (e.g., happy, energetic, excited), with one camper stating "*you are just on top of the world [at camp]*" (17y, M, brain tumor). Personal acceptance was one of the most common things campers said continued after camp, such as "*to enjoy myself and be who I am*" (12y, F, celiac disease) or "*you should be yourself*" (12y, M, asthma).

### Summary and Implications

This mixed-methods approach allowed us to identify different outcomes related to the benefits of DSSC. First, we used a quantitative approach to demonstrate positive changes to subjective well-being after attending camp, a finding similar to previous studies. Contrary to our hypothesis however, these benefits were maintained for a group of campers for up to three months after camp ended. Further research needs to consider the factors that may identify campers who are able to maintain that camp “glow” for longer periods of time. The qualitative interviews also provided insights into potential mechanisms that explain the positive outcomes reported after camp. These mechanisms included social comparisons with similar peers, and allowing for a safe and supportive environment for social and emotional development, which potentially strengthened a child’s individual identity.

Results from ours and similar studies highlight the positive effects of DSSC. For camp directors and planners these results can be used for camper recruitment by supporting efforts to help families who may be reluctant to send their child to overnight camp, to understand the different social, developmental, and emotional benefits of attending a DSSC. In addition, results can be integrated into staff development and training to help staff to understand that while camp is a fun week, for many of these campers it is also life changing. Finally, study results can be used to assist camp directors and planners with age and disease specific programming as well as support fundraising efforts that support DSSC.

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## **PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL: EXAMINING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUPPORT FOR YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL AMONG PARENTS OF SUMMER CAMP PARTICIPANTS**

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Year-round school is defined as the reorganization of days within a school calendar year to provide regular breaks and instructional blocks, unlike the traditional 9-month calendar in which breaks are compressed during the summer months (Worthen & Zsiray, 1994). When schools started to implement year-round school, a number of advantages and disadvantages were identified. Advantages included the mitigation of summer learning loss (Fairchild, McLaughlin, & Costigan, 2007), improved student health (von Hippel, Powell, Downey, & Rowland, 2006), and better use of community resources (Fairchild et al., 2007). Disadvantages included increasing responsibilities for administration and teachers (Pelavin, 1978; Zykowski, Mitchell, Hough, & Gavin, 1991), parental scheduling challenges (Gottschalk, 1986; Zykowski et al., 1991), and lack of community buy-in (Zykowski et al., 1991).

Year-round school models can impact summer learning experiences for youth, particularly activities and programs such as summer camps that may be scheduled across multiple weeks. Although numerous studies have examined parental perceptions of the developmental outcomes of summer camp (e.g., Baughman, Garst, & Fuhrman, 2009; Henderson et al., 2007, Michalski, Mishna, Worthington, & Cummings, 2003), no published studies have examined parental perceptions of year round school, particularly from the perspective of parents whose children attend camp.

### **Purpose and Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine parental perceptions of year round school and to identify factors that influence those perceptions. This study was informed by the literature on summer learning loss. Summer learning loss explains the loss of academic skills as measured by grade-level equivalents on standardized tests that some children experience the summer months of a traditional school calendar (Downey, von Hippel, & Broh, 2004; Fairchild, et al., 2007).

### **Methods and Procedures**

This qualitative study was part of a larger investigation of parental perceptions of the developmental outcomes of camp experiences. Parents were asked to complete a parent questionnaire when they registered their child for camp. A total of 2,952 parents responded for a 23% response rate (total potential  $N = 12,064$ ). Specific questions were asked to explore parents' perceptions of year-round school. The primary question was "Are you in favor of year-round school? Why or why not?"

Conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used by a three-member team to code the qualitative responses. After initial codes were identified, a comparative coding process was used to identify patterns across codes, which then allowed the researchers to construct the primary themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An inductive approach was used, allowing the data to point toward broader generalizations (Maxwell, 2012).

### **Results**

Three themes were constructed to describe factors that influenced parental perceptions of year-round school. The themes suggest that families had different needs and that these needs influenced whether or not parents were in favor of or against year-round school. First, some

children had educational needs that were best addressed during year-round school (in favor of year-round school), while other children were best served through access to informal experiential learning experiences such as summer camps (against year-round school). Many of the parents who were against year-round school were concerned about the impact of year-round school on their child's camp experience. Second, children need a summertime break for personal restoration, and parents viewed this restoration as either requiring the full summer (against year-round school) or requiring breaks at regular intervals (in favor of year-round school). Third, parents valued family time. Families with two working parents viewed the year-round school as a better fit for their family schedules (in favor of year-round school), while other families felt that longer summers provided better opportunities for family experiences (against year-round).

As these themes suggest, parental decision-making about year-round school was grounded in parents' concerns for their children (i.e., their child's educational needs and need for restoration) and their family (i.e., their family's needs for time in support of family vacations, traditions, and travel). Informed by these themes, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of parental perceptions of year-round school.

Although three themes emerged from the data, an alternative perspective was also identified in which parents were neither in favor or nor against year-round school. These parents lacked personal experience with year-round school, did not fully understand year-round school models, or were ambivalent about the possible positive or negative influence of year-round school on their child.

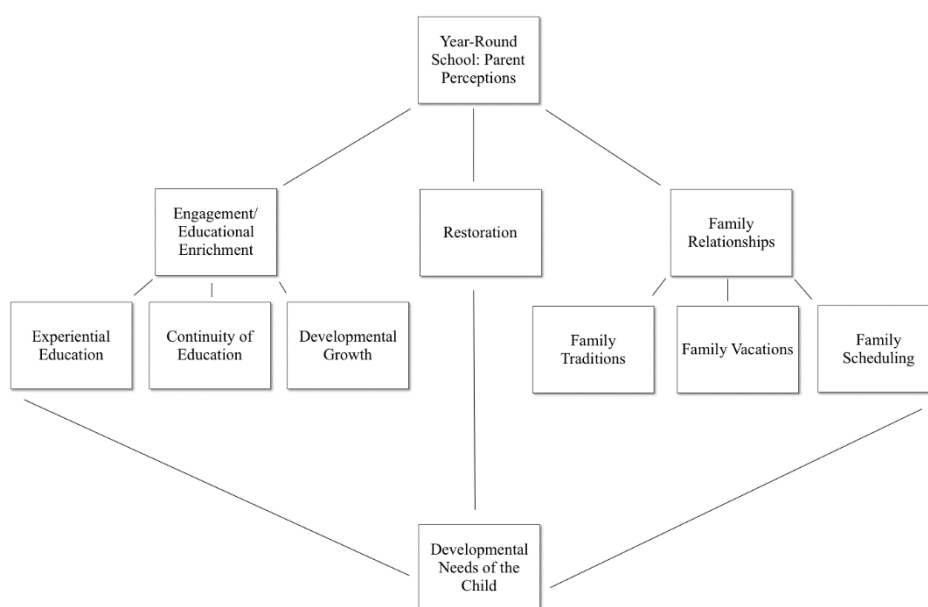


Figure 1 . Conceptual model of parental perceptions of year-round school

### Implications

The study findings illustrate factors that influenced parental perceptions of year-round school. As interest emerges within school districts to explore year-round school models, school administrators, and other community-level decision-makers should consider these factors, which reflected a variety of parent perspectives and family situations.

These findings provide additional evidence of the importance of the camp experience to many parents, yet the findings also highlighted that families face different struggles (e.g., family scheduling) and have different needs (e.g., educational needs of their child). In some cases year-round school models may be a more effective way for parents to meet the needs of their children

and families, even if the adoption of year-round school would require summertime program providers (e.g., camp providers) to modify how camp sessions are offered. In this study, having sufficient time for family leisure in the summer was important to parents, which supported the literature on family leisure as building cohesion, adaptability, and communication within families (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

School administrators who are considering year-round school options can use these findings to inform parent education and outreach regarding year-round school options and the costs and benefits of year-round school versus traditional school calendars. Future studies should build on this exploratory study to test the conceptual model and to examine parental perceptions of year-round school among other parent samples.

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## **CONDITIONS OF THE CAMPER-COUNSELOR RELATIONSHIP FOR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

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Residential camps provide youth with opportunities to grow through exploring activities, meeting new people, and living away from home. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a skill set that consists of five inter-related concepts: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Summer camps are well situated to enhance social skills (Bialeschki & Sibthorp, 2011), however, limited research has examined youth emotional development at camp. SEL is impacted through social interaction, learning to recognize and manage emotions, and understanding the impact of personal behaviors on others (CASEL, 2013). Summer camps are interactive environments with the opportunity for experiencing challenges as youth lack their home network and are encouraged to build new relationships. Thus, SEL is a skill set that may be impacted through camp. The counselor is a key individual while campers navigate this setting, due to their multi-faceted role. This analysis explored the conditions of the camper-counselor relationship for impacting youth SEL at camp.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual frameworks of social learning theory (Bandura, 1978) and positive youth development (PYD) were utilized to understand how SEL may occur from camper-counselor interactions. Counselors have the distinct responsibility for modeling and teaching positive behaviors with the hope campers will absorb these formal and informal lessons. Social learning theory situates learning as a reciprocal experience with the individuals in the setting. PYD suggests healthy adult-youth relationships and skill improvement are essential to enhancing developmental outcomes (Eccles, 1999; Larson, 2000). Camp programs provide opportunities for youth to engage and form positive relationships with supportive non-parental adults (Bowers et al., 2014; Henderson et al., 2007). This presentation presents the convergence and divergence of three perspectives garnered in the study as they relate to specific conditions important to youth SEL.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was employed to explore how SEL might transpire within camper-counselor relationships at a traditional co-ed summer residential camp in a rural Midwestern community. Twelve ( $n = 12$ ) female campers aged 10-12 years and their four female counselors were interviewed across the four-week sessions. Each counselor was observed for 14-16 hours during a designated session. The female sample was selected to gain an in-depth understanding, as prior studies found boys and girls differed in their perspective taking, emotional concern, and personal distress (Barr & Higgins-D' Alessandro, 2007). Parental consent was obtained for camper participation in the study and campers, with consent, were identified by randomly selecting three to four campers from the cabin of the counselor being observed that session. Counselors recruited for this study were aged 18 years or above, assigned to work with this age group, and had a minimum of one year prior experience. Campers participated in semi-structured interviews on the final day of camp. Pre and post camp interviews were conducted with the counselors. Observations occurred during two structured and two unstructured periods per day over four days for each counselor. These observations lasted 15-60 minutes depending on the activity, as some unstructured activities included transition periods while structured activities involved formal activities lasting approximately one hour. Observation

periods were staggered across the day to observe the counselor in a variety of settings with their campers. Interviews and observations were transcribed verbatim and analyzed following the phenomenological approach of listening multiple times for verbal and nonverbal cues, thorough reading and rereading of transcripts, and identification of meaning units and clustering central themes, which were compared across interviews and observations to garner the essence of the counselor-camper interaction phenomenon on SEL (Giorgi, 1997; Hycner, 1985).

### **Results**

Two key conditions of the camper-counselor relationship emerged: meaningful engagement and modeling. These conditions are widely acknowledged as essential factors for PYD, and this study identified comparable findings for SEL.

#### *Meaningful Engagement:*

The camp's loose structure encouraged youth-peer interaction. However, campers actively sought meaningful interactions with their counselor. Observations revealed counselors had less meaningful interactions during structured activities compared to unstructured times (e.g. transition or cabin time). Counselors de-emphasized their camper relationships to encourage camper-peer friendships. Regardless, campers were observed seeking their counselor's attention throughout the program. Campers believed their individual or group conversations with counselors were significant and meaningful. These conversations frequently occurred at bedtime, but some "deep conversations" spontaneously happened while walking or sitting together. Campers felt appreciated, and valued their counselor's viewpoints during these conversations while the counselors were unaware of their impact. Counselors were focused on addressing campers' inter-personal conflicts.

#### *Modeling SEL*

Counselors intended to model inclusivity and consideration through their peer relationships. The counselors' prior attendance as youth campers influenced their intentions. Some counselors sought to emulate their counselor's supportive attitude while others intended to model greater empathy and understanding. The counselors' observant behavior as youth influenced the belief that all campers were observant and could vicariously learn SEL. Their perception was confirmed when the campers easily recalled and described their counselor's demeanor during interactions. Observations revealed counselors' inconsistently modeled SEL behaviors, as they demonstrated inclusivity and care sometimes while displaying indifference and disregard in other instances. Their indifference included ignoring campers or prioritizing personal needs over their campers' needs. These inconsistent behaviors may have limited any positive effects.

### **Discussion**

This study confirmed prior research showing campers seek meaningful engagement with their counselor (Gillard & Aaron, 2009) and suggested counselors may facilitate SEL. The counselors believed campers could learn SEL vicariously, yet they inconsistently modeled positive behaviors. SEL interventions target multiple dimensions for adults and youth (Durlak et al., 2011), and a comprehensive approach may be equally suitable for camp. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found teachers with enhanced SEL competencies were more apt to recognize and address youth's social and emotional needs. Thus, counselors may serve as better role models when their skills are enhanced. Youth learning is intertwined with the counselor's personal development on the job (Duerden et al., 2014).

### Implications

Camps provide a conducive environment for impacting SEL as both inter-personal and intra-personal skills are engaged (Larson, 2000) and the camper-counselor relationship may provide an important avenue for SEL. Administrators may consider examining their camp structure and intentionality behind camper-counselor interactions. This examination could reveal key conditions and times when camper-counselor interactions could be conduits for teaching SEL lessons (formally or informally) while helping counselors understand the broader impact of their behaviors on observant campers. Camps are encouraged to incorporate specific SEL opportunities for both counselors and campers.

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## **RACE-EVASIVENESS AMONG CAMP WORKERS**

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Camp workers have hope that summer camp plays a role in helping kids bridge differences. Educational research, though, raises concerns about preparing youth workers to combat racism. For example, Jupp, Berry, and Lensmire (2016) reviewed teacher studies and outlined a literature that examined educators' problematic understandings about race and racism. Moore (2002; 2003) conducted the most prominent research on race at summer camps by studying campers *doing race*, but paid less attention to racial practices of camp staff. My study draws on prior school research and critical Whiteness studies to examine race-evasiveness among camp workers based on their similar status to school-based educators working with youth.

### **Theory and Methods**

Two decades of teacher identity studies document how White teachers understand and enact race, from their pre-service trainings to their careers as professionals. This work frames my qualitative examination of how camp workers discuss racism and racial justice.

This study is part of a larger activist intervention project in which I facilitated antiracist trainings and discussions among camp workers, from counselors to executives. Like McIntyre's similar project with teachers (1997), I sought both to effect change among workers and to derive scholarly knowledge about racial understandings from these encounters. For conversations about race and camp, I spoke formally at two camp conferences and three pre-summer orientations in addition to doing in-the-field staff support at my home camp. The majority of people involved with these discussions about race at camp were White or European-American. I spoke to more residential camp than day camp workers.

My ethnographic notes as participant-observer from these encounters and subsequent analyses constituted the data that informed my conclusions. For analysis, I made use of constant comparative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to arrive at the emergent categories (Charmaz, 2014) described below. At later analytical stages, grounded theory techniques to develop theoretical sensitivity helped in the refinement and explication of results (Charmaz, 2014). I discussed notes and insights with other race activists and theorists, while recurrently consulting with academic literatures to develop coherence and instrumental utility (Eisner, 1991)

### **Results**

I examine the significance of camp workers' race talk. My analysis highlighted two major thematic categories of discursive strategies that reflected camp workers' race-evasiveness. The first was a commitment to upholding hegemonic understandings of race and racism. The second theme was the prioritization of White comfort. Both represented ways that camp staff evaded critical engagement with antiracist discussion.

#### **Upholding Hegemonic Understandings**

Researchers have documented a variety of hegemonic understandings about race that teachers use and that fit dominant racial ideologies and hierarchies (Amos, 2011; Picower, 2009; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Many of these same understandings also commonly surfaced in my work with camp staff.

Colorblindness in conversations about race and youth work functioned to obscure how racism shaped people's ideas and experiences at camp, as has been documented as *colorblind racism* in other contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). A main component of my trainings was discussion of vignettes illustrating processes of racism at camp. Common responses to these diminished the significance of race, even when involved persons explicitly pointed out racism

they experienced. When tasked with brainstorming antiracist responses and preventive measures, even participants who selected a racial justice training persisted in elaborating alternate explanations or solutions that did not involve race. Lewis (2001) noticed this tendency in a predominantly White school where people *deracialized racial incidents*.

Similarly, general humanist ideas of caring helped many camp workers avoid acknowledging the pervasiveness of racism. By responding to vignettes with the suggestion that kids should just be kinder, camp workers ignored the racialized nature of some conflicts. These general calls for a caring community in response to racism were common among camp staff. As instances of colorblind racism, they mirrored Lewis' (2001) finding that adults variously "denied the cogency of race" (p. 791). The camp workers with whom I discussed race upheld these understandings to the detriment of frank and productive antiracist conversation.

### **Prioritizing White Comfort**

The other prevalent type of discursive strategy among camp workers was to prioritize White people's comfort. DiAngelo has repeatedly documented ways that the emotions of White people are re-centered and given primary importance (DiAngelo, 2011; DiAngelo & Allen, 2006).

One vignette that camp staff heard involved a Black boy calling out a White boy's racism. One training attendee said they would respond by chiding the Black boy because it is "not nice to say that about someone." This response not only negated the Black boy's victimization (and resistance!) but also prioritized the White aggressor's feelings. Researchers have recorded similar commitments to protecting White feelings at the expense of clear and compelling challenges to White supremacy, even within antiracist efforts to deconstruct racial hierarchy (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014).

I noted a similar focus on White comfort as camp staff responded to various other vignettes with ideas for how they could approach White youth after racist incidents. Racist events became teachable moments for White youth, but, if Black youth were even considered, it might be an opportunity to punish youth of color for their reactions. In this way, a racist situation could be compounded by camp staff's re-marginalization of young people of color.

I also witnessed a White camp director prioritizing his comfort when confronted with a vignette about racist programming: "If I'm doing something offensive, tell me and I'll change." This approach has the effect of evading complicity in racist wrongdoing and shrugging off one's responsibility for self-education. Both approaches were particularly unproductive for camp leadership. Picower (2009) stressed that "emotional tools of whiteness," especially self-protective ones, "serv[ed] to obfuscate the concepts [under discussion]" (p. 205) and "protect dominant and stereotypical understandings of race" (p. 197). Similarly, in my discussions with camp staff, prioritizing White comfort forestalled acknowledging the problem of racism.

### **Implications for Camp**

Educational researchers have found similar race-evasiveness among teachers. Carrying over their insights into the camp world, acknowledging that White camp teachers can hold both progressive and regressive racial beliefs is important (Jupp et al., 2016). In fact, voicing one's racial (and racist) ideologies opens a person to critique and can be an essential step in *learning* and moving toward antiracism (Lowenstein, 2009).

Applebaum (2013) recommends practitioners cultivate an *ethics of vigilance* to counteract the pervasiveness of racism in individual psyches and in society. These findings would seem to call for camp workers' increased reflexivity. The qualitative findings presented here, furthermore, prepare camp professionals for conversations by contributing to a knowledge

of where camp people are at with regard to their comprehension of and their stances toward race, racism, and racial justice.

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## **PERCEPTIONS OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH AT A RESIDENTIAL SUMMER SPORT CAMP**

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Each year 14 million children and adults attend camp (American Camp Association[ACA], 2013) and more than 14,000 day and resident camps exist in the United States alone (ACA, 2014). Summer sport camps are a viable location to examine positive outcomes for children and perceptions of their growth as campers. These camps may offer opportunities to develop in a variety of domains, including social and emotional, through the development and advancement of new sport skills. Researchers have examined the camp context and discussed it as an environment in which youth development occurs (ACA, 2005; Henderson, Scheuler, Bialeschki, Scanlin, & Thurber, 2007; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Parents describe their children as gaining confidence and self-esteem, increasing in independence, and building leadership and friendship skills while at camp (ACA, 2005). Although there are findings regarding outcomes of the camp experience and parental perceptions of children's growth while at camp (ACA, 2005; Thurber et al., 2007), additional research examining campers' and leaders' perceptions of growth may be beneficial. In addition, previous camp-related studies do not utilize a theoretical approach to investigate campers' growth. Our current study uses the 5Cs framework (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000) to describe campers' and leaders' perceptions of children's growth while at camp. The interviews used to inform this study were a subset of data from a larger case study that addressed the research question: how do the leaders, environment, and programming contribute to positive youth development (PYD) experiences for children at a residential summer sport camp? The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the types of growth experienced by campers at a residential summer sport camp.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Lerner et al. (2000) developed an approach to PYD termed the 5Cs. This framework identifies and categorizes the positive outcomes children experience within five qualities: competence, confidence, character, caring (or compassion), and connection. Lerner (2005) explained competence as an individual's ability to be academically, socially, and vocationally successful, while confidence (i.e., positive self-identity) is the belief one has in the self. Character is described as possessing positive values, integrity, and moral commitment. An individual's sense of empathy towards others in their life is termed caring or compassion and connection is the relationships an individual has with their family, peers, and community (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Within this framework, it is expected that if children acquire the 5Cs, they will thrive (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) and subsequently, display a 6<sup>th</sup> C of contribution and giving back to their community (Lerner et al., 2000).

### **Methodology**

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was conducted from a constructivist paradigmatic position with a relativist ontological perspective and a subjectivist/transactional epistemological perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krane & Baird, 2005). The case site for this study was a residential summer sport camp. It was selected as it was believed to provide examples of positive youth development and opportunities for campers to experience growth while at camp. A total of 57 individuals participated in 67 one-on-one interviews and focus

groups. Interview participants included counselors, coaches, senior campers, counselors-in-training (CITs), and leadership staff. To complete the case study, observations were recorded as field notes and initial and ongoing training documents were collected for analysis. Data analysis was completed with the assistance of NVivo software. An inductive approach was taken to become familiar with the data and identify sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2002). First cycle coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) was completed, which prompted the selection of the 5Cs as a guiding framework for further deductive analysis. Second cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014) of the data was then completed using the 5Cs (Lerner et al., 2000) as a guiding theoretical framework with sub-themes pertaining to the 5Cs identified.

### **Results**

Many participants felt that children experienced growth in all 5Cs as described by Lerner and colleagues (2000). However, the most commonly discussed characteristics were connection and confidence. Sub-themes for connection included making new friends for the camp session, making life-long friends, and helping others integrate into camp life. Campers' confidence was perceived as developing as a result of becoming comfortable in the camp setting, making new friends, and from campers pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone (e.g., physically when trying new activities, and socially when overcoming homesickness and interacting with other campers). Opinions of campers' growth varied depending on the participants interviewed. Adult leaders were best able to articulate specific examples of campers displaying each of the 5Cs, while CITs were able to reflect on and discuss personal experiences from their time as campers. Although some long-term campers discussed camp and their experiences as contributing to their personal development, not all campers were able to provide examples of personal growth experiences while in the camp environment. Perhaps these campers did not have enough time to reflect on their time at camp and how it contributed to their development. Overall, many campers, CITs, and leaders described camp as a positive environment in which children experienced growth in a variety of domains. In addition, many CITs displayed the 6<sup>th</sup> C, contribution, when they discussed returning to camp with the hopes of giving back and positively impacting campers, as they were impacted during their time at camp.

### **Discussion and Camp Implications**

Findings from this study highlight the types of growth most commonly perceived to be experienced by children while at residential summer sport camp. Suggestions are provided for camp management and leaders regarding how to provide opportunities for campers to develop in each of the five characteristics. Providing information in initial staff training regarding the types of growth that children experience while at summer camp may contribute to gains in the 5Cs. In addition, training staff on how to intentionally use camp programming and individual interactions with campers to facilitate these opportunities for positive outcomes may be beneficial. Although clear that leaders and campers perceived that connection and confidence were the most typically developed youth outcomes, future research may investigate how camp leaders can provide more opportunities for youth to develop in each of the 5Cs to promote thriving and contribution among campers.

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## **EXPLORING RELATIONSHIP FORMATION BETWEEN STAFF AND CAMPERS AT AN OVERNIGHT SUMMER CAMP**

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Summer camps are one of the largest organized interventions for children in the United States (Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007). Due to the large presence and the length of stay at many camps, summer camps greatly influence both the children that attend as well as the young adults who are employed there. Camp research, often studied through a positive youth development perspective, has found that camp has a positive influence on the lives of youth: increasing communication skills, teamwork, social skills, skill building, and spirituality (Bialeschki et al., 2007; Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, & Thurber, 2007; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007).

The use of trained staff who encourage supportive relationships may account for some of the positive outcomes (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007). Similarly, staff-camper relationships are often viewed as, or have the potential to be, mentoring relationships (Garst & Johnson, 2005). However, most research on summer camps has only included outcome measures with little understanding of the processes of how these outcomes might arise (e.g., Larson, 2000; Thurber et al., 2007). Therefore, the aim of this study was to advance this area of research by using qualitative methodology to learn about staff-camper relationships and the underlying processes that allow for the development of interpersonal connections.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed relational developmental systems theories (RDST) and positive youth development (PYD) perspectives. This study sought to understand the development of close relationships between campers and staff by examining the mutually influential relations involved. RDST considers individual  $\leftrightarrow$  context relations to be the fundamental unit of analysis (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015). Accordingly, this study focused specifically on the mutually influential relations of camper-staff relations (i.e., individual  $\leftrightarrow$  individual) and how these relationships were formed. In addition, this study used a PYD approach in thinking about youth development from a strengths-based approach. The PYD perspective suggested that when the strengths of youth are aligned with assets in their community, youth will thrive (Lerner et al., 2005; 2015). In this case, camp staff members were viewed as community assets that can be leveraged and aligned with campers' strengths.

### **Method**

I present research on relationship formation between staff and campers developed from qualitative analyses of 15 semi-structured interviews conducted in a Midwestern Jewish overnight camp. Participants included eight campers (50% female,  $M_{age} = 12.75$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) and seven staff members (57% female,  $M_{age} = 18.86$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ). Participants were interviewed during camp and on camp grounds. When no new concepts related to the research aims emerged during several consecutive interviews, I determined saturation was reached. I used memoing throughout for both the data collection and analysis processes to increase rigor as well as to aid in the development of themes (Riessman, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used thematic analysis to explore the processes through which campers and staff became close and connected

as well as to elucidate potential barriers to the formation of these close relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### Results

Through descriptive coding, I identified several themes essential to the process of relationship formation (see Table 1 for examples). Campers identified that when a staff member is “more like a camper than staff” and less “like an authority,” they felt more comfortable talking with them, respected them more, and made a connection. Staff members echoed this theme. In a similar vein, campers noticed when staff “don’t want to be around us as much,” or “would rather be doing something else,” they reciprocated this feeling by no longer initiating engagement with staff. The desire to be with campers was clear when staff members responded to the campers’ affection with sentiments such as, “it’s like mutual. I really love them too.” This reciprocity was met with a growing trust and connection between campers and staff. Through staff’s desire to engage and the campers’ recognition and reciprocation of this desire, staff and campers co-created a mutual connection.

Table 1

*Themes, Category Codes, and Examples from Campers and Staff*

Theme	Coded example response (Staff)	Coded example response (Camper)
1. Staff Identity	“I think being playful most of the time is the best thing to do, ‘cause like I never really wanna be super serious with my kids”	“She’s just more strict and not as spirited as the other ones”
2. Wanting to be with campers	“It’s also like hard when you see different staff members just like, not with the kids and with other staff [instead]. But I think that’s always gonna happen”	“Like the ones that don’t like hanging out with campers. Like, why would I wanna hang out with them if they don’t wanna hang out with me?”
3. Being on camper’s level	“Just to talk to campers as much as you can, and really show them, like the genuine person that you are instead of trying to be like an actual--what a counselor’s supposed to be like on like paper and stuff... instead of just like being mostly a mentor to them, also being a friend, so they feel a lot more comfortable with you”	“I like when counselors talk to us like friends more than like an authority”
4. Camper Personal Characteristics	“One of the campers, it’s not like a, it’s a relationship, but it’s kind of not a great one as in like she doesn’t open up to me and she does have like social issues and learning difficulties”	“Campers who like take up all of [staff] time cause they’re complicated [get in the way of forming relationships with staff]”

5. Differential Treatment	“We got feedback from one of the camper questionnaires and it said like that we favored one kid in the cabin and that was like really hard for us because we don’t—like we don’t think that we do, and I still kind of don’t think that we do, but someone in our cabin felt like we did, so that’s—that’s all that matters”	“I don’t think they hate anyone but I just don’t think they like some of them, I don’t know...they treat them differently than other campers”
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### **Implications**

My findings highlight the ways in which campers view the staff and the tension between friend and authority figure that staff must navigate. These findings can be used to enhance staff training and the ongoing supervision of camp staff throughout the summer. For example, when training staff on the importance of developing close relationships with campers, concepts such as “being on the camper’s level” and presenting oneself as less of an authority figure can be emphasized. In addition, when hiring camp staff, directors might more explicitly consider applicants’ motivation for wanting to work at camp. That is, the desire to spend time with the kids and develop close relationships with them should be considered above and beyond other motivations (e.g., wanting to be with friends).

In addition, this research illustrated the importance of youth involvement in the training development and process. For instance, campers could be invited to speak during staff training about their positive or negative experiences forming relationships with staff. The findings also point to the need to further study the barriers to forming interpersonal connections between campers and staff members. In addition, future research should investigate if these findings generalize to other camp settings with different cultures and missions.

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## **THE EFFECTIVE CAMP RESEARCH PROJECT: A GROUNDED STUDY OF LUTHERAN CAMPS IN WISCONSIN**

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Research is expanding in the American camping industry as a whole, thanks in large part to the efforts of the American Camp Association (ACA). However, little has focused on the unique settings of religiously affiliated camps, and even less on specifically Christian camps. Christian ministry professionals and camp directors frequently rely on anecdotal evidence to support their claims for the value of camp, while scholars and researchers have largely ignored or dismissed its value for ministry (Sorenson, 2016). Claims are made that summer camp experiences are life changing or transformative (Dean, 2010), except these claims often are outweighed in the youth ministry literature with assertions that camp experiences are mere fun and games, theologically shallow, or fleeting (DeVries, 2008; Root, 2014; Yust, 2006). An adequate scholarly foundation has not been laid to support the diversity of claims related to camping ministry.

The purpose of the Effective Camp Research Project (ECRP) was to offer an intimate and in-depth perspective of a particular form of camping ministry to provide a foundation for future research. The research team adopted the methodology of grounded theory to answer: *What is the impact of the one-week Christian summer camp experience on the lives of the primary participants and their supporting networks?* Our findings provided evidence for a distinctly Christian camp model, which consists of five fundamental characteristics and impacts participants in empirically recognizable ways.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The research efforts of ACA and its affiliates demonstrate that camping programs are effective in achieving desired outcomes that include spirituality (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007), but Christian ministry sites have specific religious goals that have little to do with a general notion of spirituality (Ferguson, 2007). Sensitivity to non-religious camps has resulted in a hampered ability to adequately address the distinct characteristics of religiously affiliated camps in general camp studies (Henderson, Oakleaf, & Bialeschki, 2009). Religiosity cannot be compartmentalized from other developmental outcomes at Christian camps because of the emphasis on the integration of faith practices and reflection throughout the experience (Sorenson, 2014). The unique characteristics and interplay of variables at religious camps has been demonstrated in studies of Jewish camping (e.g., Sales & Sax, 2004), but comparable studies have not been completed in Christian camping. The dearth of research and conflicting information in the literature justifies a grounded theory approach, which does not seek to test hypotheses but rather to generate new theories grounded in the data themselves.

### **Methodology**

The grounded theory phase of the ECRP examined three camps in Wisconsin affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Data were gathered in summer 2015. At each camp, focus groups were conducted with 11-14 year-old camp participants (25 girls in three groups and 21 boys in three groups), summer staff members (17 in three groups), and church professionals who were visiting camp (11 in three groups). Interviews were conducted with camp directors, and detailed field notes were recorded during a four-day site visit. The three interviews and 12 focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Three members of the research team

thematically coded these data for interrater reliability. Parents received electronic surveys two weeks after their children returned home. A total of 386 parent surveys were completed. The survey included 13 quantitative questions and four open-ended questions. Responses to the open-ended questions were coded and included in consideration of the emerging themes, while the quantitative questions were analyzed with descriptive statistics. Coding followed the methodology of Charmaz (2005) using initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding.

### Results

The major finding of this study is: *The Christian summer camp experience directly impacted the participants in positive and recognizable ways, and these impacts extended to their supporting networks.* This finding was clear across all data sources and all three camps. Evidence suggested that the impacts continued after the camp experience. Some of the most intriguing evidence came from the parent data stream. Fully 94% of respondents rated their child's camp experience at least an 8 on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 defined as "superior experience"). It was clear from their explanations of these ratings that parents were not looking for change or transformation when they picked up their children at the end of the week; they were primarily looking for smiles. Although their expectations seemed limited to fun and safety, they enumerated changes they saw in their children. Roughly half (48%) identified positive personality changes like increased self-confidence, happiness, and maturity, and about one-third (31%) noted positive changes in faith commitment such as more frequent faith practices, confidence discussing faith, and engagement in congregational ministries. The faith changes were frequently tied closely to other identified changes, as in one typical parent response:

She is excited and happier, more willing to connect to others. She is more considerate and she adds in things when we are talking like, "I wonder if Jesus did this," and she is a little more willing to help others. She is listening better, too.

The impacts enumerated by parents and the young people varied in degree and type, which indicated that camp does not have a single determinative outcome but rather a set of potential impacts. It is misleading and erroneous to say that the camp experience caused change. The data showed, rather, that the camp model, when faithfully practiced, opened the possibility for change in individuals and their supporting networks. The degree and duration of the impacts were unique to the individual participants and were largely dependent on their specific life circumstances. Camp was part of a much larger ecology of personal growth and faith formation.

Five interrelated characteristics emerged from the participant descriptions that the data suggested were fundamental to the camp model of these three camps. The five fundamental characteristics, along with a representative quote from the camper focus groups included:

- **Camp is relational.** *"We're all so different, but we all came together like a 500-piece puzzle you just put together for the first time."*
- **Camp is participatory.** *"They're teaching us things without us knowing that we're being taught."*
- **Camp is different from home.** *"Once you actually get away from your life, you can see a whole different angle, and it can be a lot more fun and exciting."*
- **Camp is a safe space.** *"I feel like no one will judge you because of what you believe here. That's why I like it."*
- **Camp is faith-centered.** *"Praising God isn't a thing I hate doing anymore. It's a lot more fun. I see why we [go to church] now."*

These five characteristics have no set order, and they manifested differently in various contexts. The camp model may look different from camp to camp, from week to week at the same camp, and even from person to person within a single camp group. These findings indicated that the camp model is highly adaptable, even though staff members and clergy showed clear preferences for their specific camp and its particular way of contextualizing the model.

### Implications

This study has revealed a new conceptual model of camping ministry that is closely related to other forms of summer camp but also has important differences. The most notable difference was the centrality of faith to all of the programs and activities. The findings also suggested that Christian camp critics are overgeneralizing when they claim that camp is theologically shallow or offers a brief high that quickly fades. These data revealed deep faith exploration and clear impacts that continued well after participants returned home. The finding that these impacts are empirically recognizable suggested that a large quantitative follow-up study of camp participants could confirm the validity of the camp model and give indications of the specific circumstances leading to substantial growth or, on the other hand, leading to negative experiences.

Such a follow-up study began as phase 2 in summer 2016. It included pre-camp, post-camp, and 8-week follow-up surveys of more than 1,000 campers at six camps, including the original three. This project promises to be the watershed of many more research initiatives focused on the unique paradigms of religiously affiliated camps.

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## **DEVELOPING COLLEGE READINESS SKILLS AT CAMP**

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Attending camp has been linked to a variety of outcomes, and research suggests that camp participation can have a positive impact on adolescent development (e.g. Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Garst, Browne, & Bialeschki, 2011). Lacking in the literature is an examination of whether camp impacts educational choices and supports college readiness skills. The purpose of this study was to examine if Camp Newaygo promoted college readiness skills in female alumnae. Using a retrospective analysis approach, alumnae were asked to report whether they felt camp impacted their educational choices and the extent to which certain skills, related to college readiness, were impacted by their experience.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Several studies examining college readiness focus on academic achievement of students (e.g., grades, testing scores, high school transcripts) and factors such as finances, family circumstances and school characteristics that impact student success (e.g. Allen, Robbins, & Sawyer, 2010; Gaertner & McClarty, 2015). Tierney & Sablan (2014) state that we must look beyond high school transcripts and think of other factors that impact college readiness. Some skills that impact college readiness include (but are not limited to): time management (Tierney & Sablan, 2014), critical thinking skills, communication, teamwork and collaboration, leadership, problem solving (Nelson, 2012; Mueller, 2009), independence, self-efficacy, autonomy, overcoming obstacles, and self-regulation (Nelson, 2012; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). Schools serve as the central provider for college readiness but youth development and afterschool programs aid to support preparation for college (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). “Activities that support going to college, don’t necessarily talk about college” (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, p. 208) but provide youth opportunities to develop self-efficacy, face challenges, develop self-regulatory skills, and promote goal setting.

### **Methods**

Data for this study were acquired during a reunion hosted at Camp Newaygo in the early summer of 2016. Women who attended the reunion were, during their youth, a camper in the girls’ resident camp that had been in operation for 90 years. One hundred and fifty women attended and were distributed a voluntary survey. A total of 59 women (40% response rate) completed the survey. The survey was created to examine long-term impacts of Camp Newaygo on women’s lives. Embedded within the survey were questions related specifically to how camp may or may not promote educational choices and career readiness. Participants were asked: *Did your camp experience impact your educational choices?* They responded by circling either Yes, No, or Somewhat. A series of quantitative questions were developed to examine to what extent camp promoted college readiness skills. Respondents were asked to: *Please identify to what extent, if any, each of the following skills was impacted by your camp experience?* Using a 4-point Likert scale of To a Great Extent, To Some Extent, Not Much Extent, and No Extent, participants were asked to report how these skills were impacted by their camp experience. Participants were also asked to answer the following open-ended question: *Please elaborate on how your camp experience did or did not impact your educational choices.*

## Results

Forty-eight percent of the women reported that camp had an impact on their educational choices, 22% reported that camp somewhat had an influence and 32% stated that camp did not have an impact on their educational choices. Fifty-seven women responded to questions related to college readiness skills—with two abstaining. Of the college readiness skills 60% or more stated that all skills were impacted by their camp experience, with the highest impact being independence and teamwork (Table 1). The extent to which camp influenced specific college readiness skills differed, but findings suggested that Camp Newaygo did promote college readiness skills in women to varying degrees.

Table 1

*Percentage of College Readiness Skills Impacted by Camp Experience*

Skills	Response Category		
	To A Great Extent	To Some Extent	Not Much Extent
Independence/Self-reliance	91%	9%	
Teamwork	91%	9%	
Resilience	89%	11%	
Leadership	88%	8%	4%
Grit and Perseverance	84%	16%	
Self-Efficacy	84%	16%	
Communication	78%	20%	2%
Problem Solving	75%	25%	
Self-Management	70%	28%	2%
Self-Regulation	65%	30%	5%
Time Management	65%	26%	9%
Critical Thinking	60%	31%	9%

*Note.* This survey was conducted using a 4-point Likert Scale with the fourth category as No Extent. None of the participants reported No Extent so it was removed from the table.

Sixty-two percent of the women responded to the open-ended question *Please elaborate on how your camp experience did or did not impact your educational choices.* The main theme that emerged from this data analysis was the impact camp had on promoting independence. One participant (age 25-34, who attended Camp Newaygo for 10 years as a camp, counselor in training and counselor) stated: *“I was comfortable going away to college where I didn't know anyone. I had confidence in myself to make friends and be self-sufficient.”* Another women (aged 35-44, who attended Camp Newaygo for 6 years as a camper and Counselor in training) reported, *“I felt comfortable taking a path different than my family and to embrace a major that wasn't "conventional.”*”

## Implications

Based on the data from this study, findings suggested that camp can serve as a venue for promoting college readiness skills. Camp Newaygo did not offer a college access program intentionally designed to promote academic skills in their participants. Rather, they offered a traditional female residential program that provided girls (now women) the opportunity to gain skills relevant to college readiness and preparation. As Savitz-Romer & Bouffard (2012) stated, youth programs do not have to talk about college but instead provide opportunities to develop self-efficacy, face challenges, develop self-regulatory skills, and promote goal setting. These skills coupled with other college readiness skills can aid an individual in their college

preparation. These findings suggest that camp can have a positive impact on college readiness and adds to the body of literature on youth outcomes of camp experiences. Future research should be conducted to examine how camps can facilitate college readiness skills in youth.

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## **THE DEVELOPMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE EXPERIENCES AT SUMMER CAMPS**

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The purpose of this study was to better understand youth's experiences with success and failure at summer camps. Both success and failure have positive qualities, but when either occurs repeatedly or in excess there can be counterproductive impacts (e.g., Heatherton, Wyland & Lopez, 2003; Neff & Vonk, 2009). Success and failure have been linked to summer camp settings (e.g., Astroth, 1996), yet few studies investigated youth's lived experiences at camp with success and failure.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

This study was informed by theories associated with achievement goals (Ames, 1992) and the appraisal process (Lazarus, 1991) related to success and failure experiences. An achievement goal refers to the reason an individual is pursuing a task (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996), and is the criteria individuals use to evaluate the outcome of their performance (Urdu, 1997). There are two types of achievement goal orientations: task (focusing on mastery) and ego (focusing on "favorable normative standing among peers;" Fry & Newton, 2003, p.51). Task orientations predict sustained motivation and active coping in the face of failure while ego orientations predict withdrawal and unproductive coping (Grant & Dweck, 2003).

Appraisal theory examines an individual's views of a situation and the associated emotional and behavioral responses. When a situation is appraised as a threat, individuals employ coping mechanisms to deal with the stressor (Smith & Kirby, 2009). Three forms of coping are: (a) problem-focused coping (e.g., assessing what went wrong and how to fix it), (b) emotion-focused coping (e.g., positive reinterpretation of the event), and (c) avoidance-focused coping (e.g., distracting oneself either cognitively or behaviorally; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Very little is known about how these processes may unfold for youth when experiencing success and failure at summer camp.

### **Methods**

The sample for this study included 32 campers attending not-for-profit summer camps. Campers were between the ages of 12 and 14 years old. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed via open and axial coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Inter-coder reliability was used to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the interview data.

### **Preliminary Results**

Youth's subjective perceptions of success at summer camp meant effectively connecting with others ( $n = 23$ ) and accomplishing their personal goals or tasks ( $n = 20$ ). Successful experiences occurred primarily during activity-based camp programming ( $n = 20$ ) and in social realms ( $n = 12$ ). The goals that campers were setting in these contexts were task-oriented ( $n = 29$ ) with a focus on learning (e.g., "Well personally I think it's to feel like I've helped somebody. To know that I've changed somebody else's life in some way. And I think that's the main thing"). Campers viewed the successful situations at camp as significant because it was novel ( $n = 12$ ), important to them ( $n = 8$ ), or made them feel good ( $n = 7$ ; e.g., "It's something that's not very common around where I live that I wanted to learn about"). The experience was a success because they had met their personal goals ( $n = 28$ ). Subsequently, campers experienced positive affect ( $n = 31$ ) such as feeling happy or excited. The successful experience motivated campers ( $n$

= 11) to pursue similar or different tasks at camp and impacted their self-efficacy ( $n = 8$ ; e.g., “I felt great! Yeah because most of my other friends had done it so it was cool to know that I could do it also. I felt kind of more excited to climb and less anxious about climbing knowing I could do that so I could do the easier ones a lot faster”). Success helped campers learn about effort ( $n = 13$ ; e.g., “What did I learn from that... just don’t give up halfway to making your goal. Stay with it all the way through and it will pay off. You will leave with a lot of happiness”) and pro-social skills ( $n = 11$ ). Campers felt that next time in a similar situation they expect to succeed again ( $n = 32$ ; e.g., “Well as long as I put myself out there then I’ll meet new people and have a good time”).

Youth’s subjective perceptions of failure at summer camp meant they didn’t accomplish their personal goals or tasks ( $n = 18$ ) or connect with others ( $n = 17$ ). Campers experiences with failure occurred mostly during activity-based camp programming ( $n = 20$ ) and in social realms ( $n = 11$ ). The goals campers were setting in these contexts were mainly task-oriented ( $n = 25$ ) though some youth set ego-oriented goals ( $n = 10$ ; e.g., “To not make a big fool of myself in front of so many people that know how to do it”). Youth viewed failure situations at camp as negative ( $n = 18$ ) or threatening; personal goals had not been met ( $n = 28$ ). Some campers attributed the cause of failure to lack of effort, bad luck or timing, other people, lack of ability, task difficulty, or equipment. Campers mentioned using three different mechanisms to cope with the failure experience: (a) problem-focused coping ( $n = 19$ ), (b) avoidance-focused coping ( $n = 14$ ), and (c) emotion-focused coping ( $n=10$ ). The majority of campers indicated experiencing negative affect ( $n = 31$ ) such as sadness and being down after failing. Many campers demonstrated perseverance after they failed ( $n = 21$ ; e.g., “I put those emotions into trying harder and trying to move faster so I could get there in time”). Some were hesitant to persist ( $n = 4$ ) after failing and only did due to a counselor’s encouragement or using additional coping skills. A few campers withdrew ( $n = 5$ ) or gave up entirely. Failure helped campers learn about effort ( $n = 13$ ) and pro-social skills ( $n = 11$ ; e.g., “Try and be a part of the group and look at other people’s feelings before yours. Because if you are not having the best mood, I wouldn’t want to hang out with me if I wasn’t acting very positively because you want friends to lift you up not to put you down”). Campers tended to say that next time in a similar situation they expect to succeed again ( $n = 26$ ) because they learned from their mistakes or would try harder.

### **Discussion and Implications for Camp**

The findings from this study illustrated how success and failure experiences may influence emotional and behavioral responses. As anticipated, there are opportunities for success at camp, which are important to positive youth development. Additionally, failure exists at camps and plays a vital role in campers learning skills such as persistence and productive coping.

Although exploratory, the results from this study provide implications for camp staff. Campers use goals to evaluate their performance, but many times these goals are unconscious and implicit. While implicit goals are just as important in driving achievement thoughts and behaviors (Bargh & Morsella, 2008), at times these goals are unproductive for youth, which can lead to withdrawal from challenges (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Camp staff may consider ways to reframe camper’s ego-oriented goals into more task-oriented ones as a way to reposition failures as learning opportunities. This can be done by engaging youth in conversations about their goals, inquiring about what the camper learned, and emphasizing the importance of the learning process, not the end product.

Several campers appraised their experiences with failure as a threat and utilized different coping mechanisms. Many campers engaged in adaptive coping behaviors by dealing directly

with the stressor. However, some youth distracted themselves and avoided the stressor, which is considered maladaptive (Hampel & Peterman, 2006). Camps have the opportunity to help youth embrace failure as a learning opportunity by helping campers use productive coping strategies. Camp counselors can help youth process failure or stressful situations with techniques such as journaling or debriefing. Through these processes, staff may be able to help campers to engage in emotion- or problem-focused coping mechanisms and minimize avoidance or distraction coping.

Camp is a unique setting where youth can experiment with both success and failure. The transient nature of camp allows youth to practice social and friendship-making skills (Arnold, Bourdeau, & Nagele, 2005), but there is an inherent exposure that comes with meeting new people. Campers mentioned being closed off, withdrawing from social situations, and not being a part of the in-group. Yet in the camp context, there is often a level of staff rapport and emotional safety, and a new camp session represents new faces and new opportunities to practice lessons learned. Likewise, camp programs are often fluid and flexible. Campers can frequently determine their own goals and have opportunities to exert influence and agency over their successes and failures (Astroth, 1996). Contextual attributes such as flexible programming, staff rapport, transient social spaces, and relevant/engaging practice opportunities position camps as fertile settings for youth to learn via a balance of success and failure experiences.

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## **CULTIVATING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES IN AN ACADEMIC SUMMER CAMP SETTING**

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Career and college exploration programs for adolescents serve an important purpose. They allow for investigation of adolescents' emerging strengths and abilities that may be important for their educational or career development. Because identity exploration and identity development are prominent developmental tasks for adolescents, enrichment programs play important roles in facilitating these processes in adolescents. Collectively, the literature regarding the impact that traditional after-school enrichment programs have on participants is robust (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Shernoff, 2010). However, the ability to apply and generalize these findings to settings outside of school environments is limited.

Therefore, the current study used the detailed version of the American Camp Association Youth Outcome Battery (YOB; second edition) to examine the effects that participating in a residential academic summer camp had on participants. Through this study, researchers sought answers to each of the following questions: a) Did participating in an academic based summer camp cultivate feelings of camp connectedness among attendees? b) Did participating in an academic summer camp lead to positive youth development outcomes related to friendship skills, perceived competence, problem-solving confidence, and teamwork? c) Did participating in an academic summer camp lead to significant changes in participants' friendship skills, perceived competence, problem-solving confidence, and teamwork over the duration of the camp experience?

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Exploration, at its core, is a defining feature of adolescence. Theorists have examined this term as it pertains to autonomous decisions (Albert & Steinberg, 2011), individuation (Blos, 1967), development of an identity (Marcia, 1966), and role preparation for entrance into society. During adolescence, physiological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes can strongly influence the development of educational and occupational aspirations (Watson, Quatman, & Edler, 2002). The search for personal growth, autonomy, and a true sense of self that is inherent to this distinct life stage can also be found in the summer camp experience. Garst, Browne, and Bialeschki (2011) purport that participating in a camp can contribute to healthy transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

Therefore, while academic based summer camps on college campuses are designed to help students prepare for their transition and entrance into higher education, very little is known about the impact that the camps themselves have on participants beyond academics. There are a myriad of studies that have examined the social and psychological benefits that participating in after-school and other academic enrichment programs provide. Stake and Mares (2005) coined the phrase "splashdown effect" related to the gains in self-confidence and motivation that participants received after participating in a science-enrichment program. In addition, a sizable



body of research shows that youths can learn and improve their personal and social skills that could result in increases related to peer competence, problem-solving, and self-efficacy (Durlak et al., 2010). High-achieving youths may benefit significantly from enrichment programs that promote their personal and social skills, particularly if their varied interests and their advanced levels of ability or high levels of achievements either isolate them or make it difficult for them to relate and connect with peers (Bain & Bell, 2004).

Despite the knowledge that these studies provide for extracurricular enrichment programs, there is a lack of clarity regarding the impact of academically-oriented summer camps on participants in generating these positive youth development outcomes. Therefore, this study investigated whether positive youth outcomes could be cultivated in participants after attending a one-week residential academic summer camp. Indicators of camp connectedness along with youth development outcomes related to friendship skills, perceived competence, problem-solving confidence, and teamwork and were analyzed.

## Methods

### *Participants*

One hundred and sixty-three participants (73 boys and 90 girls) aged from 11-17 years ( $M = 14.29$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ), were recruited from the Youth Adventure Program (YAP) residential academic summer camp that is held on the campus of Texas A&M University. YAP is designed for academically minded middle school and high school students and allows participants to explore college majors and career options in a campus setting.

### *Measures*

The detailed version of the American Camp Association (2013) Youth Outcome Battery (ACA YOYB; second edition) was administered to gauge camp connectedness and assess changes in participants based on their camp experience. The detailed version was selected as it generated normative statistics related to self-rated retrospective changes among participants for the youth development outcomes being investigated. Data related to five of the 12 subscales featured in the Youth Outcome Battery were obtained including: *Camp Connectedness*, *Friendship Skills*, *Perceived Competence*, *Problem-Solving Confidence*, and *Teamwork*.

## Results

Results showed that the calculated mean for camp connectedness ( $M = 5.30$ ) was above average but not significantly different from ACA norms for residential programs. In contrast, the mean of each of positive youth outcome subscales are well above ACA norms, with friendship skill ( $M = 5.07$ ), perceived competence ( $M=4.91$ ), problem-solving confidence ( $M = 4.97$ ), and teamwork ( $M = 5.16$ ) all placing above the 90% percentile. A t-test comparison of these mean difference yielded significant difference for each, with friendship skill  $t(162) = 18.83$ , perceived confidence  $t(162) = 19.70$ , problem-solving confidence  $t(162) = 24.98$ , and teamwork  $t(162) = 24.93$  all being significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

Beyond these initial aspects, using data from the detailed ACA-YOYB (American Camp Association, 2012), mean differences were calculated for the four subscales that allowed for the measurement of participant changes over the duration of camp. Each of these indices saw a

positive increase, with the mean differences for friendship skills (.79), perceived competence (.86), problem-solving confidence (.77), and teamwork (.87) all reflecting gains from the start of camp. A one-sample t-test was then conducted to examine whether these changes were significant. Findings again indicated that participants showed remarkable gains in each of the four areas with the mean differences for friendship skill  $t(162) = 15.90$ , perceived confidence  $t(162) = 16.31$ , problem-solving confidence  $t(162) = 15.35$ , and teamwork  $t(162) = 15.36$  -- all statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

### Implications

The data showed the summer camp environment facilitated participant growth and positive youth outcomes in areas beyond that of the immediate scope of the camp, and mirrored the established effects seen in traditional school-based academic enrichment programs. Although students attended camp for academics, significant gains pertaining to peer relations, perceived competence, and problem-solving confidence were cultivated across the duration of the camp experience.

The implications of the findings to camp directors is clear. Despite data that showed that participants' were no more connected to this camp than any other residential program, significant gains across four salient dimensions were found. The cultivation of these positive youth outcomes is believed to be a result of a residential camp structure that reflected an immersive, interactive, and investigative nature and environment. The implementation of engaging and enriching activities and events that emphasized cooperation and collaboration had far reaching ramifications beyond just the aspect of connectedness. Our findings demonstrated that in an especially designed learning environment, students are able to solidify a career interest while gaining valuable social skills and peer competencies that will enable them to not only clearly define their goals and aspiration but better equip and empower them to reach them. Further investigation is warranted to replicate these findings across a variety of camp structures and settings.

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## **A REASON TO STAY: THE JEWISH CAMP COUNSELOR EXPERIENCE AS IT RELATES TO JOB RETENTION AT JEWISH RESIDENTIAL CAMPS**

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Camp counselor retention is important to the business of camping because veteran staff play a key role in a camp's success. Veteran staff help to preserve camp culture, maintain camp traditions year after year, and serve an important role in the naturally occurring peer-training and peer-support environment that camps depend on (Byrnes, 2004; Foundation for Jewish Camp, 2011; Powell, 2002). Staff who come back to camp for multiple summers tend to be driven to improve their own individual performance and also improve the camp experience in general. Returning staff do not experience the long adjustment period that so many first-time staffers experience and are able, instead, to plunge deeper into more complicated training topics that will ultimately serve their campers better. When camps do not (or cannot) retain staff, there is a necessary increase in staff-training hours while new staff spend valuable time acclimating to a new place. There is, in addition, a purely economic factor to a camp administration's desire for high staff retention—the cost of hiring and training new staff is higher than the cost of maintaining current staff (Byrnes, 2004; Powell, 2002). If camps knew how to appeal to staff so that returning to camp for multiple years was more attractive, they would increase overall productivity as well as program quality.

### **Research Problem**

For those who grew up going to summer camp as kids and loved the experience, coming to work at camp for one year (usually immediately post-high school) is an easy decision. For many recent high school graduates camp provides an easing into a first job experience and may even feel like a continuation of the camper experience. Coming back for a second year after their first year away at college can also be an easy decision because counselors often want to spend another summer with friends (Foundation for Jewish Camp, 2011). Those who come back for a third summer are more likely to be choosing camp over internships, spending the summer with new friends or making more money at a *real job*.. The biggest drop-off in counselor retention occurs before the third year (Finkelstein, 2013). If camping professionals knew more about what motivates counselors to return for a third, fourth, or even fifth summer at camp they would be better equipped to target their retention efforts, and would succeed at building a more stable and better trained staff for their camps.

A gap in the literature exists around the study of camp counselor retention. Few qualitative studies can be found on the subject and no qualitative studies of staff retention focus exclusively on Jewish summer camps. Few studies have touched explicitly on the question of motivation and/or longevity to explore questions about the number of years staff continue to return to camp. "While a large body of literature supports the developmental benefits of camp for youth, fewer studies have investigated the impacts of camp on camp staff" (Duerden, M., Witt, P., Garst, B., Bialeshcki, D., Schwarzlose, T., & Norton, K., 2014, p. 26). The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach allows for an in-depth exploration into this topic and a deeper understanding of the shared lens through which camp counselors view their experience, especially around the question of whether to return to work at camp.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used. IPA is designed for a small group of up to 10 participants (Smith J., Jarman M. & Osborn M., 1999 as cited in Fade, 2004). In-depth interviews were used to capture a precise description of the interviewee's experience. Questions were kept open-ended as much as possible in an effort to allow the interviewee to describe their perceptions without any hindrance (Creswell, 2007; Fade, 2004;). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, the interviews were coded and then compared with each other to find shared themes across participants. Although limited in scope due to the small sample size, the choice of IPA allowed for considerable depth among a few individuals and offered the possibility of exploration of a larger picture of the participants' experiences.

Interview data were collected from each participant via Skype over the course of three informal, interactive, open ended, semi-structured, and hour-long interviews. The semi-structured interview allowed for an organic unraveling of ideas that the interviewee felt were important and relevant, and offered a framework for the researcher to adjust questioning based on responses received. The semi-structured interview gave an opportunity for the interviewee to be "more a participant in meaning-making than a conduit from which information is retrieved," (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). The interviews for this research study were modeled after a standardized open-ended interview (Turner, 2010).

### **Results**

These counselors stayed at camp for different reasons. They stayed because they were invested in their campers and want to continue to contribute to their campers' childhoods. They stayed for their own friends—often continuing to invest in friendships that had been building since the counselors themselves were campers. They stayed because overnight camp offered them an opportunity to gain useful skills that they knew would help them as they moved into specific careers or continued with their education. When those skills clearly fit into a specific professional trajectory such as Jewish education, clergy, or other Jewish community profession, staying at camp became even easier. Whether they grew up at camp or not, they developed an attachment to the physical place of camp and longed to be back summer after summer. Camp was also a place where they felt successful and they returned to the scene of their success to continue to flourish.

Camp was sometimes a place that counselors felt uniquely connected "Jewishly," whether these specific young adults grew up in practicing Jewish homes and whether they connected with the Jewish life on their college campus, Jewish camp is a place where they could continue or renew their spiritual connection to Judaism. Although certainly not the majority, some of those counselors interviewed just realized that this time in their lives was for being at camp; they were in no hurry to discontinue their somewhat predictable summers in favor of unknown internships or jobs.

These returning counselors also speculated on why others stopped coming back to camp. For some, camp simply might not be a "good fit." Others might never fully make the transition from camper to counselor and did not enjoy being "behind the scenes." For some, the culture of appreciation at camp might be a contributing factor. Although most of the interviewees acknowledged that while lack of appreciation might be mentioned as a reason that some counselors left, those who stayed, did so in spite of that lack. They were able to accept and understand the specific culture of appreciation at their camp. One thing was for certain--no one

worked at camp for the money. While small salaries could be a cause for attrition, those who stayed found reasons despite the absence of monetary incentive.

### Implications

According to the data gathered in this study, the best predictors of staff retention were well-aligned staff career goals. When staff (and their parents) saw camp as applicable to their future selves and in line with their career goals, they were more likely to return. Solid staff programming, good support and training, decent wages, adequate appreciation, and opportunities to spend time with friends all helped but the single most important factor was whether staff were convinced that a job at camp improved chances to gain a job somewhere else later on.

Jewish camps, in particular, offered their counselors an opportunity to connect with religion and/or spirituality in a safe, peer-rich environment. However, for counselors determined to acquire skills directly related to their future employment goals this connection was likely not be enough. A better approach for Jewish camps may be the possibility of a Jewish community job network, the creation of specialized internships for camp counselors, and any other career-specific advantages that could be offered.

Camp directors might want to focus retention efforts on those counselors predetermined to most likely to remain at camp. Based on the data gathered in this study that means those emerging adults pursuing careers in fields of education, Jewish communal work, social work, and non-profit management. Focusing retention efforts specifically on those counselors will help directors focus their limited resources and manage their expectations.

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