

**2003 Camp Research Symposium
ACA National Conference Denver, Colorado**

Impacts of Residential Camp Counseling on Adolescent Leadership Skill Development

Barry A. Garst, CPRP and Jeremy Johnson
Virginia Tech
bgarst@vt.edu

The Threshold for Staff Transformation: An Ethnography of Girl Scout Camp Staff

J. Joy James
Clemson University
janaj@clemson.edu

**Summer Camps for Children with Cancer and Their Siblings:
Impact of Social Comparisons on Psychosocial Outcomes**

Lisa J. Meltzer, Ph.D. and Mary Rourke
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
meltzerl@email.chop.edu

**Perspectives from the Trenches – Staff Perceptions of Camper Outcomes
Staff, Interviews, Progression, Outcomes**

M. Deborah Bialeschki, Ph.D., Karla Henderson Ph.D., Amy Krehbiel and Dawn Ewing
The University of North Carolina and Morry's Camp
amkladybug@hotmail.com

**Opening the Doors to Leadership Development:
Leadership Self-perceptions among Adolescent Campers at a Residential Youth Camp**

Rachelle H. Toupençe
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
toupençe.rach@uwlax.edu

The Voice of the Campers – Research Findings through Qualitative Data Collection

M. Deborah Bialeschki, Ph.D., Karla Henderson Ph.D., and Dawn Ewing
The University of North Carolina and Morry's Camp
moon@email.unc.edu

Thanks to: Gwynn Powell, Dale Adkins, Karen Paisley, Randy Grayson and Sandra Hupp

Impacts of Residential Camp Counseling on Adolescent Leadership Skill Development

Barry A. Garst, CPRP and Jeremy Johnson

Purpose: Camping professionals and researchers have long since recognized that camp is more than a location or a program, it includes *what happens to youth* during and after the camping experience. Research suggests that camp participation impacts youth in multiple ways by enhancing affective (self-esteem and self-concept), cognitive (knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes), behavioral (self-reported behaviors and behavioral intentions), physical, social, and spiritual growth (Shepard & Speelman, 1986; Gillett et al., 1991; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Chenery, 1994; Brannan & Fullerton, 1999; Garst & Bruce, 2001; Henderson, 2001).

In addition to impacting youth participants, camping participation also benefits the leaders and supervisors who work with youth (Purcell, 1998). For many camps, these supervisors are teen counselors or teen leaders—youth who have taken on the responsibility of teaching and caring for younger campers. With increasing emphasis on responsible youth program management, camp directors are expected to document the benefits or outcomes of their camping programs, which includes the benefits or outcomes of teen counseling. Research suggests that camping participation helps teenagers to develop leadership and life skills (Thomas, 1996; Purcell, 1998). In addition, residential youth camping provides an excellent context for the development of leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills (Thomas, 1996).

The camp context is also important. Research suggests that the residential nature of camp may have implications for adolescent development (Garst, Scheider, & Baker, 2001). Because residential camping occurs in a novel, equalizing context, many of the socio-economic and cultural barriers that identify teenagers in home or community settings may not be as prevalent in residential camp settings. Thus, teen counselors may be able to explore or demonstrate aspects of their personality that they might not demonstrate outside of camp due to the social influences of peers.

Although collecting evaluation data from teen counselors is important, an equally important goal is the way in which data is collected. Today's teen counselors want and expect the opportunity to verbalize their opinions, feelings, and attitudes (Chester, 2002). It is important, therefore, for camp directors to take the time to learn about the "lived experience" as it is created, described, and expressed by teen counselors at camp. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how participation in residential camping, in a teen leadership role, impacted the development of leadership and other life skills. The secondary purpose was to identify how camp teen counselors positively impacted the youth with whom they interacted and supervised.

Sample: During the summer of 2002, Virginia 4-H conducted 10-12 weeks of residential youth camp at six separate camping facilities. The residential youth camping program is designed for youth ages 9-13, with leadership opportunities provided for youth ages 14-18. The population for this study (n=1,126) was comprised of all adolescent teen counselors (ages 14-18) who attended residential camp in a leadership capacity at one of the six camping facilities. To select a sample of participants for this study, one week of camp was randomly selected for each of the facilities. All of the adolescent teen counselors who participated in camp during the selected week at the respective sites, received parental and participant consent forms prior to camp (n=131). The teen counselors (n=68) who returned their consent forms comprised the sample used in this study. They were asked to participate in a group discussion about their camp experiences as a teen counselor.

Methods/Instruments: Focus groups were used provide teen counselors with the opportunity to discuss, explore, and describe their camping experiences. Krueger (1994) recommended focus groups because they place participants in natural, real life situations and allow for the dynamics of group interaction, which often reduce inhibitions that might be present during an interview. The focus groups were conducted on-site while the camping program was in session, in meeting rooms that were quiet and located away from camp activities. A total of 11 focus group discussions were conducted (approximately

2 per sit) with group size ranging from 4 to 8 participants. The primary researcher served as the “facilitator” and a camp staff member served as the “recorder.” Recorders received training in focus groups and recording responses prior to the focus groups. The facilitator used an open-ended interview script as guiding questions to provide general structure for the discussion, and responses were recorded by hand. The primary purpose of the focus group discussions was to understand the camp counselor leadership experience as it was described and interpreted by teen participants. Focus group questions explored how teens became involved with camp, memorable experiences, development of skills, how teens might or might not be important for camp, and how the teen counselor leadership experience might be improved. Data from the focus groups were transcribed and then open and axial coding procedures were performed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding consisted of fracturing transcribed data according to phrases that represented one thought. Axial coding was then used to identify relationships between the categories. Using the axial coding process, a preliminary list of categorical relationships emerged through a semantic comparison of coded categories. The reliability and validity of the data analysis and results were provided through the use of trustworthiness procedures that included informed readers and member checking. Informed readers, who were familiar with the camping program yet were not involved directly with this study, performed an audit of the data analysis process and results (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In addition, informed readers coded the data to assess the dependability of the analysis. Member checking provided study participants with the opportunity to examine and confirm both the results and conclusions.

Results: A total of 68 teen counselors participated in the focus group discussions. A majority of participants were female (65%) and the primary ethnic groups represented were White (80%) and African American (16%). The mean age for a participant was 15 years old. Previous experience as a teen leader in camp ranged from 1-4 years, and participants had an average of 2 years of previous experience as a teen counselor in camp. Participants represented 16 different counties/cities across six regions of Virginia, ranging from urban areas in Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Hampton Roads, to rural areas in central and southwest Virginia. Data analysis of focus group responses revealed major themes related to (a) internal motives and external factors that impacted teen camp counselor participation, (b) increased understanding of children, (c) increased understanding of self, and (d) development of mentoring relationships with children. In addition, participants described how camp was very important in their lives. Many participants struggled with talking to their friends about the camp experience. Camp is not viewed as a “cool” thing to do by most participants’ friends. Participants stated that friends viewed camp as stupid, childish, for nerds, corny, lame, cheesy, and boring. Furthermore, participants shared that these negative perceptions of camp are created by the fact that their friends do not understand the context, purpose, or value of camp. Participants described how being a teen counselor at camp helped them to understand children. Specifically, participating in camp as a teen counselor helps teens to learn the developmental differences of youth, how to respect children as individuals, and the importance of recognizing how strategies that work with one child may not work with another child. Teen counselors also reported that they learned how to be patient and how to communicate with kids without yelling or abusing their authority. Participants discussed a number of ways that being a teen counselor at camp helped them to learn more about themselves. Specifically, participating in camp helped teens: (a) to become more responsible for themselves and the youth under their supervision, (b) to overcome shyness and become more confident talking in front of large groups, (c) to communicate effectively to campers and to adults in camp, and how to manage and problem-solve stressful situations. Participants identified a number of specific ways that they helped youth at camp. Helping youth campers typically involved talking, listening, sharing, and empathizing, as well as teaching campers specific skills during camp classes. In this way, teen counselors developed a mentoring relationship with youth campers.

Conclusions and Applications: The results of this study suggest that camp participation positively impacted teen counselors by helping them to develop leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Teen counselors became more aware of the developmental needs and individual differences of youth campers

and became more aware of themselves as leaders who were responsible for the welfare of children. Furthermore, teen counselors were given the opportunity to develop a mentoring relationship with young people, which was a self-reported important part of the camp teen counselor experience.

Based upon the results of this study, the following applications are suggested for camp directors who are responsible for developing and managing camp counselor recruitment and training.

1. Recruitment materials for camp teen counselors should highlight the benefits of volunteerism and should describe how camp teen counselors can use camp volunteerism to develop their resumes and to make themselves more competitive for future employment. It would be appropriate to use the teen's self-descriptions of the camp experience as promotional materials.
2. Recognizing that potential camp teen counselors may face peer pressure not to participate in camp, recruitment materials should be engaging, modern, and should describe the nature of camp volunteerism. Camp directors should candidly talk with their camp teen counselors about their friends' perceptions of camp and engage the teen counselors in a discussion regarding changes that could be made to make camp volunteerism more appealing to reluctant teenagers.
3. One of the features of positive youth development settings is the presence of caring adults. Although adolescents are developmentally classified as youth themselves, the results of this study suggest that at camp, teen counselors can function in the role of "caring adults" for youth ages 9-13, in that teen counselors listen, talk, encourage, support, and empathize with campers. Thus, teen counselors not only gain valuable leadership skills at camp, but also have the opportunity to use those skills to help youth campers, which creates a mentoring relationship.
4. The process whereby teen counselors were involved in focus group discussions about their camp experience was important to the different stakeholder groups that were involved in this study. Teen counselors learned that their opinions, feelings, and attitudes were important to camp administrators. The importance that teen counselors placed on being involved and in being listened to is a reminder that teen counselors should be engaged and involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of camp programs and the training that they receive.
5. It is important that teen counselors' contribution of care and mentoring to the camp community is recognized both publicly and privately, and that camp counselors are valued and honored for their contributions that help to make camp a positive youth development experience. Any steps that teen counselors take in their leadership development, every small step towards mastery, should be recognized, especially if it contributes toward their development.

References

- Brannan, S. & Fullerton, A. (1999). Case studies reveal camper growth. *Camping Magazine*, 1, 22-25.
- Chenery, M.F. (1994). Explaining the value of camp. *Camping Magazine*, May-June, 20-25.
- Chester, E. (2002). Connecting with Generation Why; 4-H Agents Conference, October 28, Norfolk, Virginia.
- Garst, B. A. (2002). *2001-2002 Virginia 4-H camping report: A summary of participation, outputs, and outcomes*. Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension.
- Garst, B.A. & Bruce, F.A. (2002, in press). Identifying 4-H Camping Outcomes Using a Standardized Evaluation Process across Multiple 4-H Educational Centers. *Journal of Extension*.
- Gillett, D.P., Thomas, G.P., Skok, R.L., McLaughlin, T.F. (1991). The effects of wilderness camping and hiking on the self-concept and the environmental attitudes. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 21, 33-44.
- Henderson, K. (2001). Camping gives kids a world of good. *Parks and Recreation*. November, 14-22.
- Hopkins, D. & Putnum, R. (1993). *Personal growth through adventure*. London: David Fulton Publishing.
- Huberman, A.M. & Miles, M.B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pub.
- Purcell, L.E. (1998). Does participation in the Georgia 4-H counselor program increase leadership life skill development? Paper presented at the 1998 NAE4-HA Conference, Boseman, MT.
- Shepard, C.L. & Speelman, L.R. (1986). Affecting environmental attitudes through outdoor education. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 17, 20-23.
- Thomas, H. (1996). Youth leadership: Teaching essential proficiencies at camp. *Camping Magazine*, March/April.
- Thompson, V. (2000). CITs are campers in transition: Building a successful CIT program. *Camping*, July/August.
- Thurber, C. A. (2001). Internal leadership development. *Camping Magazine*, November/December.

The Threshold for Staff Transformation: An Ethnography of Girl Scout Camp Staff

J. Joy James

Purpose: Camp touches the lives of all its participants and provides experiences that have the capability to transform people. Most studies of camp focus on the camper. This study reverses the typical research direction by examining the camp experience from the perspective of staff.

Sample: The informants for this research were obtained from Girl Scout councils in the southeast. The informants were individuals who worked full-time as an outdoor program director/camp director. The informants' ages ranged from 20 – 50. Several Girl Scout councils were represented from Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

Methods: In order to better understand how camp transforms its staff this research used ethnography which approaches research from the perspective of learning and describing culture from the people who inhabit the culture being studied. For this research, a series of ethnographic interviews were conducted. To guide the interview a framework of questions was set up. General research questions included: 1) Describe camp (people, interactions, and activities); 2) Describe how sisterhood happens between staff at camp? and 3) How did you see change in the staff? After the interviews were completed, the investigator conducted analysis to determine domains that best represented the culture of the Girl Scout outdoor professional (Spradley, 1979). Through domain analysis, a theme became evident – transformation became the common thread of the Girl Scout outdoor professional. Based upon initial interviews, this research draws upon anthropologist Victor Turner' ideas of transformation and liminality (Turner, 1967).

Instrument: In ethnographic interviews, the main instrument is the researcher. In recognition that the researcher as the instrument could impact or enhance the research, it was important to acknowledge her bias. The first bias to mention is her lifelong involvement with Girl Scouting. With these experiences of being a girl member, volunteer and professional scout, it allowed both an emic (inside perspective) and etic (outsider perspective) approach to describing the culture. Another bias was her familiarity with some of the informants. These women ranged from friends, former supervisors and colleagues as well as her original childhood camp director. These biases could pose detract the data analysis due to the researcher's prior involvement and investment in camp. However, in ethnography the acknowledgement of the researcher's personal bias prior to and during the research process strengthens the interpretations.

Results: While the primary purpose of camp is the child, this research indicates that the staff members are benefiting from camp as well. The research findings indicate that experiences such as camp can transform or foster growth in staff (often in subtle ways) and in turn these transformations are passed on to campers. Some of the experiences that contribute to the transformation of camp staff include the camaraderie and friendships of the other staff members, leadership opportunities, and the camp rituals.

Practical Application of the Findings: Before discussing the practical applications of this research, it is necessary to describe some of the experiences that foster transformation in the staff. Further explanation will put into perspective the usefulness of this research to the camp profession. Some examples of experiences that contribute to the transformation of camp staff include the camaraderie and friendships of the other staff members, leadership opportunities, and the camp rituals.

As the staff comes together in staff training, they begin to move through the camp experience together spending twenty-four hours day and night together. In less than three months, staff indicated that this intense time period cultivated friendships that lasted a lifetime. Their daily dealings of living so closely forced each staff member to face both the positive and negative aspects of not only their personality but also their interaction with diverse personalities. These situations, forced the staff to face each trail and tribulation daily unlike any other circumstances prior to or after camp.

Camp offers a tremendous amount of leadership opportunities both over campers and with peers. The informants indicated that these experiences were offered in the safe and supportive atmosphere of the

camp community. Personal risks could be taken and mistakes could be handled. The staff member is able build their leadership skills through actual experience without fear of negative repercussions or embarrassment. Leadership transforms a staff member on personal and professional level.

The daily and weekly camp rituals also play a part in the transformative experience of camp staff. One example is the ritual of singing songs throughout the camp experience. The leading of silly songs allows for a childlike goofiness normally not acceptable for young adults in society. Camp is a world for staff that is betwixt and between (Turner, 1967). Paralleling this world are staff members young adults who are themselves in between adolescence and adulthood. Defining what is socially acceptable behavior in this between stage can be a challenge in their lives outside of camp. However, through camp's rituals, societal roles and behaviors can be attempted and played out through camp's silliness. Camp is a world where the norms of society are turned upside down and inside out into a culture of its own. Through this parody of societal norms and rituals, camp in actuality reinforces the values and expectations of young adults in our society.

The staff comes to work at camp for a variety of reasons. In particular, the staff and camp directors see themselves as fostering growth and development in the children. Yet, while these women did not expect to see change in themselves, it was the very thing that happened. These experiences for camp staff culminate into an experience that may alter a staff member's life. Whether it is self-efficacy, a different career path, introduction into a recreational choice or a change of social group, the camp experience can transform the growth and development of a young adult. Acknowledgement of camp's value to not only children but also the staff increases the success of camp.

Through investigating these types of "transformative" experiences, we can begin to understand more of the components that are necessary for providing growth and development to young adults. Camp is planned and implemented primarily for the child, but these findings indicate there is a positive byproduct for the staff as well. This byproduct is a transformative experience of the counselor that enhances their development as adults in society. In the past, the focus was on training the staff for implementing camp as well as for the care of the campers. While it has always been recognized that the staff are the backbone of camp, often their development into adulthood through the camp experience is overlooked. Redirecting our focus to encompass both the camper and counselor enhances the camp experience for all involved.

Recognition of the impacts camp can have on a staff member will help with staff training, retention and recruitment. Through exploring the transformative experience from a transitional state, camp administrators can begin to build staff training that supports and enhances the positive culture of camp. A camp director's understanding of the development process of the staff member from adolescence into adulthood will contribute to the quality of the camp for both the camper and the counselor. Through staff growth better decisions are made regarding the care and safety of the camper. Furthermore, the camaraderie and bonds that are fostered from the transformative experience of camp hopefully lead to both retention and recruitment of staff.

Through investigating these types of "transformative" experiences, we can begin to understand all the components that are necessary for providing growth and development to young people. For some camps the camper remains for as little as three days or as long as eight weeks. However, the staff remain over the entire summer. The staff camp experience and growth could be viewed as a reflection of the camper experience on a much broader scale. Investigating camp through the lens of its staff members further substantiates the all-encompassing benefits of camp.

References

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Turner, V. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Summer Camps for Children with Cancer and Their Siblings: Impact of Social Comparisons on Psychosocial Outcomes

Lisa J. Meltzer, Ph.D. and Mary Rourke

Objective: To examine social comparison as a mechanism that contributes to higher levels of perceived self-competence and less social isolation of children and adolescents after one week of summer camp for children with cancer and their siblings.

Background Information: Research examining the psychosocial benefits of summer camps for children with chronic illnesses is limited and mostly anecdotal. Social comparison, a mechanism that likely contributes to the benefits of disease specific camps, has not been empirically studied in camping research. Social comparison theory suggests that as humans we have an innate drive to evaluate our emotions and abilities, and if there is no objective standard by which to compare ourselves, we will compare ourselves to other people. Many children with chronic illnesses such as cancer may know only a few other children who have a similar illness, and therefore compare themselves to children who have never been ill. Summer camps bring together children with similar diagnoses, providing the opportunity for social comparisons with many other children who have had similar experiences. These comparisons should result in improved psychosocial outcomes.

Hypotheses

1. Positive changes in self-competence and social isolation will be related to children comparing themselves to camp peers (who are more similar) than non-camp peers.
2. At the end of one week of camp, children will feel more competent and less socially isolated.

Participants: 109 children (66 with cancer and 43 siblings) who attended the Ronald McDonald Camp (RMC) in the summer of 2002 participated in the study. Participants were 45% male and 83% Caucasian. 27% of campers were attending for the first time. Ages ranged from 8-18 years old.

Procedure: Participants completed questionnaires on the first and last days of camp. Questionnaires were administered in the cabins by volunteer counselors. Time was built into the camp schedule (30 minutes each day) for the study, thus participants did not miss any camp activity time to participate. On the last day, participants were asked to complete the Harter self-concept measure twice, once comparing themselves to children at home and once comparing themselves to children at camp.

Measures

- **Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC;** Harter, 1985) and **Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA;** Harter, 1988). The SPPC and SPPA both measure domains of self-concept (e.g., social acceptance, physical appearance, and global self-worth). The SPPA (for participants 12-18 years old) has questions phrased specifically for adolescents, and includes additional domains (e.g., romantic appeal). For both the SPPC and SPPA, participants are asked to compare themselves to statements about "some children" and then decide how true the statements are for them. Both measures reliably assess self-competence and have adequate internal reliability (coefficient alphas .77 to .92).
- **Children's Loneliness and Social Satisfaction Questionnaire (CLSSQ;** Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984). The CLSSQ is a 24-item questionnaire used to assess children's feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction. The CLSSQ has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .90) and internal reliability (Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient = .91).
- **Qualitative Questions:** Participants were asked to rate how different they felt from (1) other kids and (2) other kids at camp.

Analyses: Within subject repeated measures ANOVAs were used to examine changes in outcome variables over time and paired t-tests and multiple regression analysis were used to examine social comparison effects.

Results

1. Social comparison appears to be an important mechanism for children with cancer and their siblings who attend camp. Specifically:
 - (a) Participants reported feeling more similar to camp peers than non-camp peers.
 - (b) After one week of camp, adolescent participants reported significantly greater social acceptance, physical appearance, and global self-worth when comparing themselves to camp peers versus non-camp peers.
 - (c) Loneliness was significantly predicted by how different children felt from non-camp peers (those who felt more different reported more loneliness).
3. All measures of perceived self-competence (i.e., social acceptance, physical appearance, global self-worth, romantic appeal (teen only), and close friendships (teen only)) improved after one week of summer camp, although the changes did not reach statistical significance. This was likely due to the stable nature of self-concept. Decreased loneliness was also reported after one week of camp, particularly for adolescent siblings.

Conclusions: Summer camps for children with cancer and their siblings can help to improve self-concept and feelings of loneliness. Social comparison is one mechanism that contributes to these positive changes for children with cancer and their siblings who attend a disease specific summer camp. Practical implications of these findings are discussed in the summary.

Practical Implications Summary

What was the Purpose of the Study?

Intuitively we know that camps are a good thing for children, especially those with chronic illnesses. But there is little research that has been able to demonstrate **why** these camps are good. For example, self-esteem, which has been most commonly studied, does not change in one week. Many people in both the camping and medical communities argue against disease specific camps. They state that perhaps children should return to "normalcy" as soon as possible, including attending camp with other "regular" kids. This study investigated one possible reason why disease specific camps are important: social comparisons.

How are These Findings Helpful to Camp Professionals?

We all know camp is an amazing place. These results suggest that disease specific camps allow children a membership in a community of similar others, which in the long run will likely enhance self-esteem, self-concept, and social acceptance. The following are suggestions for camp planners, directors, organizers, and fundraisers.

1. **Plan disease specific camping experiences.** Disease specific camps **are** helpful. This doesn't mean you have to spend the week focusing on the child's illness or illness experience. By simply bringing together children who have had similar experiences, you can help decrease social isolation and improve self-concept.
2. **Including siblings in your camps for special needs populations.** Siblings are often overlooked during a child's illness, but also face many challenges when a brother or sister is ill. In this study for example, siblings were able to spend time with others who have been through the "cancer experience," decreasing loneliness. Siblings should be invited to camps with the child who has the illness or separate sibling camps/weekends should be established (e.g., siblings of children with cancer weekend).
3. **Don't exclude adolescents because they are "too old" or they have been to camp too many times.** This study demonstrated that adolescents benefit as much, if not more, than younger children from being with other similar campers. Adolescence is a difficult time for any child, with most teens

relying on peers for emotional support, including discussing issues of dating, body image, and the future. These topics are complicated if you have or had a serious illness.

4. **Take these findings to potential donors who say "show me the data."** Money is what it all comes down to in the end. This study and others like it provide solid evidence that *camp is a worthwhile investment*. With camps competing for limited resources, you need to be armed with facts that demonstrate why your organization is the best.

5. **Do Research!** Although it is difficult to conduct large scale research with a limited number of trained professionals, with enough preparation time and staff cooperation, it is possible to gather questionnaire data on more than one occasion during a camp session. This study demonstrated the ability of *conducting research during camp, without taking away anything from the camp experience*. For researchers who are not full-time camp staff members, it is important to partner with camp planners and leaders to create a team approach, resulting in staff buy-in, built in time during the camp schedule, improved data integrity, and increased camper participation.

How Do We Explain Social Comparisons to Others?

In order to evaluate our emotions and abilities, we need to compare ourselves with other people. There are two types of social comparisons, both of which can be helpful. Upward comparisons occur when we compare ourselves with others who are better off. This gives us information as well as clues about successful coping, providing hope, motivation, and inspiration. Downward comparisons are a cognitive coping mechanism where people compare themselves to less-fortunate others in order to make them feel better about their own situation ("although my situation is/was bad, at least it's not as bad as some other people").

However, if the comparison group is dissimilar, negative emotions can occur. For example, if you are an intermediate level tennis player, and you compare yourself with Andre Agassi, it may frustrate you. But if you compare yourself with another intermediate level tennis player, you may experience the positive benefits described above.

Children with cancer or other chronic illnesses may only be able to compare themselves with their "healthy" peers, which can result in feelings of sadness, frustration, and feelings of isolation. Thus **there is a need to provide children with chronic illnesses an environment where they do not feel different from their peers**. Camp provides this environment in an intensive and focused way. *Camps allow children to make more realistic comparisons*, teaching children the coping skills necessary for living with cancer or other illnesses, as well as providing positive role models.

Perspectives from the Trenches – Staff Perceptions of Camper Outcomes Staff, Interviews, Progression, Outcomes

M. Deborah Bialeschki, Ph.D., Karla Henderson Ph.D., Amy Krehbiel and Dawn Ewing

Introduction: Summer camp staff members play a variety of roles such as counselor, mentor, friend, confidant, disciplinarian, and teacher. The summer staff members are out in the trenches interacting with the campers on a day-to-day basis, witnessing their most intimate moments and interactions. The staff can provide a unique perspective on the growth and success of the campers. Observant staff members may note camper progression (or digression) and social interaction. Morry's Camp is following 53 campers in a longitudinal study to discover the outcomes of the camp experience for the youth. The campers completed anger assessments, protective factors surveys, life effectiveness scales, journal entries, focus groups, and evaluations. The Morry's Camp research team, comprised of Morry's Camp staff and University of North Carolina researchers, decided that staff members could provide a unique and valuable insight into the campers' outcomes. The purpose of this presentation is to provide staff perceptions about how Morry's Camp "gives kids a world of good." The presentation highlights the findings and the implications for other camp programs.

Description of the research process: The primary researcher visited Morry's Camp on the last two days of their final 2002 summer session. The researcher conducted personal interviews with 6 women and 5 men who ranged in age from 20-25 years old. The group interviewed represented the racial diversity of the staff with 6 European Americans, 2 Latino Americans, 2 African Americans, and 1 Asian American. Each participant signed a consent form, was interviewed in a comfortable location away from the primary camp activities, and talked between 20-60 minutes. The participants all agreed to have their interview recorded. The researcher kept a journal to take notes on the location of the interview, demographics about the interviewee, and key points about the interview. The researcher asked the staff to describe their perceptions about the goals and mission of camp, to describe times they had observed the goals in action, and to provide examples of how Morry's Camp "gives kids a world of good."

The researcher transcribed the 11 interviews verbatim and emailed the transcriptions to the participants to verify the accuracy of the information. The participants all approved the transcriptions and provided further demographic information. The researcher used open and axial coding and constant comparison analysis techniques to discover the emergent themes.

Initial Results

Five distinct themes emerged from the data: camper leadership, teamwork, skill development, self-esteem, and camp culture. The first four themes highlighted the campers' outcomes and the fifth theme defined the components that the staff felt led to the positive outcomes.

Leadership/ Maturity – The returning staff felt that the campers demonstrated progressive leadership skills and maturity from year to year, and the new staff witnessed the campers' leadership skill development through out the session.

- "I can remember Tony (older camper) working with the frosh boys and one kid was having a bad day and he was just walking away. Tony stopped playing the game and went and got the kid, talked to him, and brought him back in. I have only been here for 2 years but I can remember Tony spitting in somebody's face to where he is a really cool camper, counselor to be."
- "One camper, Michael when he was up in front of people he loved the recognition that he got and you can just see it in his face and in his smile that he loved taking leadership."

Teamwork/Selflessness- The staff noted that the campers shared with each other and worked better as a team as the session progressed.

- "At the dinner table somebody doesn't take all the mash potatoes when there are still people after them."
- "We had a child and he had a bad incident happen and the kids could have really turned on him and it wasn't anything of his fault, but the kids really rallied around him and... it pretty much exemplifies what we are doing here."

Skill Development – The staff witnessed the campers learning new skills such as swimming and learning to write and read.

- A camper from the first camp session struggled with writing letters and addressing envelopes. The office manager worked with her during the first camp session and taught her how to write a letter and how to address the envelope. During the second session the office manager was excited because, “Just yesterday I received the mail and was like Oh my god, because she not only wrote a letter to one of her counselors but she addressed the envelope correctly.”
- Several staff members noted the skill development at the pool. "I had kids who didn't like swimming at first but now they love it."

Self-Esteem/Respect- The staff felt that as the summer progressed the campers participated more and felt more secure with their peers.

- “One of my girls had difficulties dressing appropriately last summer. I picked that battle with her pretty strongly. Apparently during the year one of the foster kids that she lives with came out dressed inappropriately and she let them know that that just wasn’t going to fly. She needed to respect herself and she wasn’t going to be allowed to dress that way.”
- The trek leader spoke about one young woman who was very shy and always wore a sheet on her head as a security blanket. The trek leaders were excited because, "She took it off her head and shows her hair and she did her hair the other day and she’s really coming to be."

Leadership, teamwork, skill development, and self-esteem emerged as the campers' positive outcomes from camp. The data also emphasized the key components of the camp culture that led to the campers' positive outcomes.

Camp Culture – The staff articulated that the *camp culture* facilitated the success of meeting the camp’s goals. Four main sub-themes emerged from the data related to the camp culture:

Opportunities for: New and unique experiences; Overcome fears; Accomplishments

Camp Structure: Year-round aspect of camp; Educational component; Outcome focused programming

Staff: Positive reinforcement; **Consistent behavior; Set goals with the campers**

Campers: Determined to succeed; Accountable for their actions; Peer support

What can the camp director learn from this study?

- Staff members can provide valuable insight into the outcomes and development of the campers. Directors should consider conducting staff interviews throughout the summer and at the end of the summer to gain the staff perspective.
- The unique aspects of Morry's Camp program include the year-round component, educational focus, and outcome-based programming. Directors should examine their program for the unique aspects of their camp program. The camp's unique aspects may be the link to positive camper growth.
- Directors and staff should reexamine their mission and goals to create outcome-based programming with a focus on the positive growth and development of the campers.
- The staff noted that they set goals with each camper. Directors should consider establishing a process for goal setting with the campers and with the staff. The attention to the campers' outcomes and goals could have a great impact on the program.
- Training is a key component to the success of Morry’s Camp. Directors may want to carefully plan their training to include workshops for the staff on outcome-based programming, and role modeling.

The interviewees each brought a unique perspective depending on the number of years at camp, their year round interaction with the kids, and their position at camp. According to the Morry's Camp staff, they felt that Morry's Camp gave "kids a world of good" in relation to leadership, teamwork, skill development, and self-esteem. The staff members work day in and day out in the trenches with the campers. Directors should seize the opportunity to get to know the thoughts and perspectives of their most valuable resource, the staff.

**Opening the Doors to Leadership Development:
Leadership Self-perceptions among Adolescent Campers at a Residential Youth Camp**
Rachelle H. Toupence

Research Process

There was a two-fold purpose of the study:

1. to evaluate leadership skill development at a residential youth camp among campers in order to develop mechanisms for enhancing leadership development in a residential camp setting and,
2. to contribute to the overall understanding of leadership education.

Research Design: A correlational design was used for this study. The dependent variables for this study were the five self-perceived leadership scales of the Leadership Skills Inventory (LSI) consisting of communication, positional leadership, making decisions, working with groups, and understanding self. The independent variables were number of years spent at a residential youth camp, age, and gender.

Population and Sample: The population for this study was approximately 3500 male and female campers ages 10 to 15 from the United States who attended a residential camp in the Midwestern United States, during the summer of 1999. The camp was accessible to any camper who wished to come and acceptance was limited only by space restrictions. Scholarships were available on a limited basis for some campers based on financial need. Four hundred campers were selected to participate in the study through a simple random sample.

Instrumentation: The instrument used in this study to assess the self-perceived leadership skills of the students is the Leadership Skills Inventory (LSI). The original LSI measured ten internal scales through 99 statements. The reliability coefficients of these scales ranged from a low of .41 to a high of .79. The LSI was refined by Townsend in 1983 and consisted of 21 statements describing various leadership and life scales for this study. These corresponded to the five internal scales for analysis: communication, positional leadership, making decisions, working with groups, and understanding self. Responses were measured on a five point Likert scale of: A-strongly agree, B-agree, C-undecided, D-disagree, and E-strongly disagree. The responses were coded as A=5, B=4, C=3, D=2, and E=1 so that a higher numeric value for the response corresponded with a higher self-perception of skill.

Several researchers have recently refined the instrument. Dodson (1995) had reliability coefficients ranging from .63 - .83, Bruck (1997) .46 - .82, and Thorp (1997) .63 - .83. The SPSS^R procedure RELIABILITY was used to compute the internal reliability of the instrument in this study. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was computed for each of the five scales. The reliabilities of each of the five scales were: communication (.73), positional leadership (.86), making decisions (.72), working with groups (.69), and understanding self (.72).

Data Collection: A pilot test of the instrument including demographics questions was conducted in July of 1999 to address problematic questions and instructions. Changes were made to the letter of introduction and instruction based on the pilot test.

The LSI was administered to all subjects one time through a mail survey two to four months after the conclusion of their youth wilderness camping experience. Each packet included an introduction and instruction letter to a parent for campers, two copies of a statement of

informed consent (one to return and one to keep for personal records), a copy of the instrument to return, and a postage paid return envelope. The letter and statement of informed consent described the purpose of the research, ensured confidentiality, and gave explicit instructions for completing and returning the questionnaire. Participants were sent a reminder postcard, a second copy of the instrument, and a second reminder postcard if they failed to return the initial instrument.

A post-then test (Howard and Dailey, 1979) was used to avoid response-shift bias (Rohs, 1999). A post-then test involves the administration of an instrument, in this case the LSI, one time to participants. Participants are asked to reflect on their self-perceptions prior to the treatment (then) for the first instrument and to reflect on their self-perceptions after the treatment (post) for the second instrument. Previous research has demonstrated a tendency for respondents to underreport changes in self-perception of leadership skills when using pretest/posttest approaches. The data from returned surveys was entered into SPSS by the researcher and her assistant for analysis.

Findings: Following the camping experience, campers' self-perceptions of their leadership skills in all five scales were stronger (communication, positional leadership, making decisions, working with groups, and understanding self).

There were no statistically significant differences between male and female campers prior to a residential camping experience. Female campers exhibited a higher statistically significant self-perception of working with groups than male campers following camp.

Practical Applications of Findings: Camps face many challenges today: finding and retaining high quality staff members, year-round school programs, competition for adolescents' limited time with sports and summer employment, and, unfortunately, diminishing support and resources. At the same time there has been an increased call for leaders from industry and government. Although those affiliated with camp programs recognize that, "The Benefits Are Endless," this is not always communicated with clarity to those outside of the camp community. This study provides empirical evidence of a relationship between a residential summer camp program and leadership self-perception development. This information can be used by camping professionals to garner support for and to market their programs. It also points to an arena that individual camps can further explore to create interest and support for their programs.

This study found that the residential camping experience strengthened campers' self-perceptions of their leadership skills on all five leadership scales (communication, positional leadership, making decisions, working with groups, and understanding self). It is important to realize that the camp program studied was not designed to specifically increase the leadership self-perceptions of campers, so camps should recognize that a strong potential exists for camp programming to significantly enhance leadership self-perceptions even when it is a secondary or unrecognized goal. While the camp in question can feel confident that its programs are positively affecting leadership self-perceptions of its campers, it and other camps must also recognize that by implementing a program designed to enhance aspects of leadership they may have a profound affect on campers' leadership self-perceptions.

There were also significant differences found between male and female campers' perceptions of their ability to work with groups. Based on this finding and previous research, camps can be advised to reexamine the role of single and mixed gender programs in developing leadership self-perceptions.

The Voice of the Campers – Research Findings through Qualitative Data Collection

M. Deborah Bialeschki, Ph.D., Karla Henderson Ph.D., and Dawn Ewing

Introduction

Camp professionals and researchers inherently believe that “Camp gives kids a world of good,” yet the general public, foundations, board members, and parents want to see proof that camp is positively impacting the campers’ lives. Morry’s Camp was interested in the outcome process and partnered with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to conduct a four year longitudinal study of one group of campers.

Morry’s Camp is a year-round youth development organization that provides each child with a multi-year commitment anchored in a residential summer camp experience. The children for whom these experiences would not otherwise be available, benefit from a network of support that is focused on social skills, enhanced self-esteem, positive core values, and a greater sense of personal responsibility. The research team used a mixed methods approach to gather data from the campers and parents to examine the camp mission and outcomes.

The purpose of this presentation is to present the initial findings from two distinct methods for gathering qualitative data. Journal writings and focus groups are highlighted as the primary means for collecting the qualitative data discussed within this presentation.

Description of the research process

The longitudinal study began during the 2002 summer season and followed thirty “frosch”, fifth grade campers, through out the school year. The project was submitted and approved by the Internal Review Board at UNC-CH. The study used a mixed methods approach and gathered qualitative and quantitative data. This poster presentation is focused on one portion of the qualitative process and subsequent findings. The qualitative data were gathered through summer journals, year-round journal entries, and camper focus groups. During the summer the campers answered questions in their journals such as: “How has camp made you a better person?” “What are your future goals?” “What at camp has helped you with the way you think of yourself?” The campers continued to answer monthly journal questions through out the school year. Examples of the type of questions asked were: “How has Morry’s Camp made you different from other kids at school?” “What did you learn at Morry’s Camp about how to treat others?” “Describe a time when you were angry and what you did because you were angry.”

The UNC-CH and Morry’s Camp research team conducted three focus groups in January 2002. Two of the groups consisted of 16 total 5th grade campers. The third group consisted of 8 “post-grad” campers (campers that had graduated from the four-year program). The focus group questions addressed the camp’s outcomes specific to responsibility, self-esteem, and respect for other people.

The journal entries and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Three different researchers reviewed the transcriptions and discussed the coding schemes and emergent themes. The research team used constant comparison to examine the data. The researchers also used the N-Vivo computer program for data organization and management.

The initial findings were supported by the empowerment literature. Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment as a way people gain control over their lives through active participation with an emphasis on strengths instead of weaknesses, an acknowledgement of cultural diversity, and the use of language that reflects the empowerment ideals. Morry’s Camp used an asset-based approach by highlighting the campers’ successes and using consistent positive language. The camper empowerment is apparent through the emergent concepts of interpersonal and intrapersonal camper growth.

Initial Results

Several themes emerged from the data. These themes all seem to fall within the main concepts of intrapersonal growth, interpersonal growth, and uniqueness of the camp experience/environment.

Intrapersonal growth – Progression and growth within the individual camper.

- Sense of security
- Independence
- Sense of personal achievement

“(At Camp) I learned how to swim and when I came back home, we went to New Jersey and my uncle has a pool, so me, my sister, and brother went swimming. My sister and brother did not know how to swim so I taught them.” (Example of personal achievement)

Interpersonal growth – Progression and growth within the camper group, peer relations.

- Networks of support
- Social skills

“You meet a lot of different people that’s so fun and you wanna be around all these different people and different kinds of personalities and that’s what I like about Morry’s Camp.”

Camp experience/environment- The components that led to the campers’ interpersonal and intrapersonal growth.

- Staff as facilitators and role models
- Camper freedom to choose within the program
- Camper freedom from city life
- Set boundaries and clear expectations at camp
- Peer camper groups and communal living
- New, safe, and natural environment

"I like camp because you can see animals that you've never seen up close before. And you learn how to swim and learn about the bugs."

What can the camp director learn from this study?

Several implications can be found from this initial phase of our study:

Methodological Implications

- Director's can use journal entries to gain insights from their campers. A simple journal entry about campers’ experiences and perceptions at camp may help directors address issues relevant to campers’ positive growth and development.
- Director's can also use focus groups or personal interviews during the summer program or throughout the year to understand the campers' perspectives on the camp program and the benefits.

Implications from the Findings

- It appeared that the campers' positive outcomes resulted from the camp experience/environment (camp culture). Attention to the camp culture created at camps seems to be an important context for meeting desired outcomes.
- Directors should consider staff training as an opportunity to focus on facilitation techniques, role modeling, and setting boundaries.

In this study the conclusions based on the qualitative data suggested that camp administrators may want to emphasize the mission and goals of camp staff members, set specific boundaries and expectations for campers, create intentional outcome based activities and special events, and provide some sort of natural or unique environment for the campers. The camp experience coupled with opportunities for camper intrapersonal and interpersonal growth lends support to the fact that camp can build an empowered camper and can truly do “a world of good”.

Reference:

Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15(2), 121-143.