

Impacts of a Southern Indiana Summer Camp: Adult Reflections on Childhood Experiences

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Abstract: Scholars have well documented the impact on youth of attending a residential summer camp. Quantitative studies, generally consisting of pre/post assessments, have found positive outcomes related to self-esteem, self-efficacy, hard skills, and social skills. We explored the long-term outcomes of the camp experience through adult recollections of the camp experience. Participants' interviews provided four primary, emergent themes: self growth, affinity for nature, life skills, and relationship. Outcomes appear to stem from camper-counselor relationships and unstructured free time. This study highlights the lifelong benefits of the camp experience and suggests there is utility in collecting adult long-term recollections of childhood memories.

Introduction

Over the last 16 years, researchers have found multiple studies that underpin the assumption that summer camps have a positive impact on youth (Dworken, 2001; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007). Most of this research has focused on the camper outcomes occurring either directly after the experience, up to six months after the experience, or both (Bialeschki, Younger, Henderson, Ewing, and Casey, 2002; Brannan, Arick, Fullerton, Harris, 2000; Dworken, 2001; Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, & Thurber, 2007). Important to also note is that many of these studies have focused on camps that are American Camp Association

(ACA) accredited and offer one or more week experiences (Garst, Browne, & Bialeschki (2011); Henderson, 2012; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Throughout our literature searches, we found no studies that focused on the reflections of adults concerning their past experiences as campers. We posit that important lessons and valuable insights can be gleaned from the recollections of past campers in adulthood and what those individuals feel they have gained from their past experiences as campers after ten or more years of absence from the experience. Consequently, this study sought to better understand the long-term impacts of a residential camp experience as recalled by adults (at least 10 years following the experience) through a qualitative approach that would allow for detailed description and in depth data in order to explore commonalities and themes between the recollections of former campers.

Literature Review

Current research relating to summer camp outcomes is extensive, with many of the studies focused on parallel constructs. Camp researchers, as of late, often measure ten constructs within four categories that are part of the Camper Growth Index (CGI) (Henderson, Thurber, Whitaker, Bialeschki, & Scanlin, 2006). The CGI is broken into four categories; positive identity, social skills, positive values and spirituality, thinking and physical skills. The ten constructs within these four categories are positive identity, independence, leadership, making friends, social comfort, peer relationships, positive values, spirituality, adventure and exploration, and environmental awareness. The terminology and measured data used in different studies varies, but all variables are parallel the CGI in some manner.

Some of the earliest research on outcomes of the summer camp experience was based on qualitative data gathered by Dworken (1999, 2001) and focused in New England. Dworken's (1999) work centered on campers in New England ACA accredited camps, asking questions on the topics of mentorship, safety, nurturing environment, skills, and service. According to his respondents, counselors were their role models and they expressed they felt the camp environment was safe, in some cases safer than home. Emotionally, perceptions of camps were seen in a positive light. Campers felt healthier at camp due to more frequent physical activity, also acknowledging they learned a variety of new hard skills such as scaling a climbing wall, canoeing, and riding a horse. This study, while somewhat dated, gave camping professionals a look into the thought processes of children and their perspectives on important topics to the field.

Soon after, Dworken (2001) conducted another survey-based study on attendees of Connecticut 4-H camps for the ACA. Surveys were distributed shortly after departure from camp, through the US Postal Service, and were completed by both parents and campers. Responses to open-ended questions generally corresponded to one of forty developmental internal and external assets established by the Search Institute (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Results indicated that, according to both parents and campers, greatest gains were seen in social competencies like making friends, social comfort, and development of peer relationships. Campers also gained positive identity and values, felt empowered through relationships with role models, and learned valuable skills.

Inclusionary camp models are known to benefit all youth involved, with or without disabilities (Brannan, Arick, Fullerton, & Harris, 2000). The camp experience of several hundred youth from 12 different residential camps were studied through a pre-post or post-only process. Youth with

and without disabilities were paired together as cabin mates and each pair were studied together on inclusionary practices, outdoor skills, social interaction, and individual characteristics. Significant gains were found in outdoor skills and personal development, but greatest gains were seen in self-reliance and independence for both participants (Dworkin, 2001).

Another important study on the outcomes of the camp experience focused on participants from Morry's Camp, a unique summer camp that is made available to inner city youth through academic merit and age. Children from New York City and surrounding areas, starting in 5th grade, were given the opportunity to attend the camp for free for four weeks if they earn good grades, have demonstrated consistent good behavior, and have parental support. Bialeschki, Younger, Henderson, Ewing, and Casey (2002) collected data through both qualitative (through journal entries) and quantitative (survey evaluation) methods. Their results suggest that campers and parents are aware of the social, psychological, and physical benefits that result from camps, while they also determined that identified goals were significant to achieving outcomes desired by camp professionals.

From 2003 to the present, camp research began making a shift from understanding what the outcomes of a camp experience are to understanding why outcomes are achieved. Researchers began relating their studies to the concept of *positive youth development*. Measuring positive youth development entailed knowing what camps do for youth and how those results relate to the three important components of youth development programs set forth by Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2004); goals, atmosphere, and activities. The first nationally representative samples looking into positive youth development in camps, measured by the CGI, supported the notion that many ACA-accredited camps provide the necessary components for positive youth development (Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, Thurber, & Marsh, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007).

Other recent research focuses on peer relationships and their importance to positive youth development. Henderson (2012) stated, "Camps are extraordinary opportunities for young people to develop positive peer relationships" (p.1). Garst, Browne, and Bialeschki (2011) have taken a progressive and in-depth look at camps. Their research emphasized the importance of peer relationships and unstructured time, camp setting, rituals, and CIT programs that keep campers returning to camps in the long term. They found that both staff members and camper benefitted from camps. Youth saw improvements in a variety of areas such as self-esteem, relationships, independence, adventure and exploration, values, social skills, and environmental awareness. Staff members were found to have also benefitted from the experience with research suggesting, "camp experiences may contribute toward young adults' becoming fully functioning adults, characterized by the abilities to find employment, form a lasting and gratifying partnership, and become a community contributor" (Garst et al., 2011, pg. 81). A recent development in the discourse has been posited by Garst et al. (2011), positing that the greatest strength of camp is supportive relationships between youth and adult staff.

With the voluminous pool of literature in the camp field as a base, we took an alternative approach in comparison to past studies and pursued a retrospective angle on camp outcomes that consider the adult reflection on their experience at camp as a youth. This direction provides a new perspective, soliciting data from campers ten or more years post experience in order to

focus on the long term impacts of attending a summer camp as a youth and their reflection on the experience from an adult lens.

Methods

This study utilized semi-structured phone interviews as the primary instrument of measuring the long-term outcomes of twelve participants' experiences at a southern Indiana summer camp. Participants were gathered through a convenience sampling based on current contact information provided by the director and a snowball approach to expand the pool (Riddick and Russell, 2008). Given the time lapse sense potential participants were at camp, contacting former campers who have not attended camp in more than a decade is a difficult endeavor. Additionally, readers should hold this sampling approach in mind as a possible limitation to this study given the potential of selection bias.

Study Site

Located on 300 acres in the heavily forested hills of southern Indiana, this camp has offered summer camping experiences for youth since 1964. In its early years, camp sessions were divided by gender and mostly catered to boys. A few weeks at the end of each summer were reserved for girls' sessions. The majority of the sessions now being offered are coed. The camp is residential, offering one to six week camping experiences, with the majority of campers attending for one to two weeks. Attending campers are generally eight to 15 years of age (sometimes as young as seven) and staff members range from 15 (counselor-in-training) to young adults (~23 yoa). The camp has two adult directors plus a host of staff, generally supplying a 1:2 staff to camper ratio. There are multiple bodies of water ranging from small streams, to a pond, to a 4-acre lake on the property. Campers live in either open-air antique log cabins or traditional canvas platform tents furnished with six to twelve beds. Dining and food preparation takes place in one large centralized log cabin, serving all camp residents. Programming is heavily adventure-based (hiking, canoeing, mtn. biking, horseback riding, caving, archery, riflery, swimming, etc.), but also consists of environmental education, crafts, and other unique programs. Campers have the freedom to move from activity to activity during program periods, providing a loose structure that allows children to make independent decisions regarding how they spend their time. Programs are developed in a similar unprescribed manner during every-other-day staff meetings, on the basis of what the campers communicate to their counselors. Counselors are simply asked to do activities that they find fun and enjoyable, and develop that interest into a pleasant and meaningful activity.

Mornings begin with breakfast, followed by cabin cleanup and inspection. When cabin inspection has been completed by two to four of the older staff members, they will ring the flagpole bell, and the entire camp gathers around the flagpole. Morning flagpole consists of raising the flag, saying the pledge of allegiance, listening to cabin inspection scores, and watching skits that represent morning activities. Conclusion of morning flagpole signifies the beginning of the first free-roaming activity period in which staff members socialize with campers and lead them through outdoor related activities. Morning activities end with lunch in the central dining hall, the Back Cabin. After lunch, campers and staff return to their cabins for a short rest period before an all camp swimming session at the large lake. The afternoon activity period begins with a snack and more skits to announce the afternoon activities. Evening flagpole consists of lowering the flag, a pre-dinner game, and marks the end of afternoon activities. The entire camp moves to the Back Cabin for the final meal of the day and afterward

participates in a large all-camp activity until dark (i.e. ultimate Frisbee, capture the flag, talent show, etc.). Everyone eats a snack and gathers around the campfire at either the lake or at the front fire ring. Campfire begins, and is a performance stage for both campers and counselors. Campfire concludes with taps and everyone returns to their cabins for bed. A portion of the staff gathers at the Back Cabin every other evening to work on programming schedules and camp events.

Data Collection and Analysis Approach

Twelve phone interviews were conducted between October of 2015 and February of 2016. Initial contact was through phone. Interviews were scheduled for a week after initial contact. Interviews lasted from seventeen to thirty-eight minutes. Each interview was digital recorded for later analysis. To begin, the interview participants were asked to describe their overall experience as a camper at camp. Eight more questions such as "What did you learn at camp?", "Was unstructured time beneficial or did it hinder your camp experience?", and "Can you tell me about your relationships with fellow campers, counselors, and the camp director?" were asked. Participants were specifically asked to focus on their experience as a child.

Voice recordings were transcribed verbatim and interview data was analyzed through identifying phenomena common throughout responses. The thematic coding was conducted consistent with Creswell (1998). Three primary steps were included in the analysis process: (1) directing, recording, and transcribing interviews, (2) identifying common themes in responses, and (3) determining relationships among the themes. In step one, interviews were transcribed with Olympus AS-2000 software. In step two, the researcher reviewed transcriptions and quotes or terminology that were common in all interviews were highlighted. In step three, the quotes and terminology were organized into clear themes that organized the findings of the study. A fellow researcher familiar with qualitative research and resident summer camps reviewed research findings and confirmed their placement in the themes. Interviews were discontinued once saturation had been met, with no new themes emerging.

Findings

Analysis on interview data from twelve participants who were campers ranging from two to seven consecutive summers was utilized within this study. Given that the camp mostly provided experiences for males in earlier years, three females and nine males were interviewed ranging in age from mid-thirties to early sixties. Ages at which they began their camp experience ranged from eight years old to thirteen years old. All participants went on to be staff members at the camp ranging from three consecutive summers at the least to nine consecutive summers at the most. Four participants went to other residential summer camps lasting a week or longer. These camps were either YMCA adventure camps similar to the organization in this study or sports camps designed to improve the quality of an individual's skills as an athlete. All participants acquired a college education; five Bachelor's degrees, four Master's degrees, and the most advanced being two Juris Doctors and one Doctor of Philosophy. Each individual was employed in a different field such as investment banking, law, teaching, counseling, ministry, engineering, entrepreneurship, parks and recreation, and business management. Just as diverse as their employment was their income levels, ranging from below twenty five thousand per year to over two hundred thousand per year. Experiences as campers took place as early as the early 1970's to as late as the early 1990's.

All twelve participants stated that their camp experience influenced who they became as an adult. Four major themes emerged that highlighted specifically how their experiences impacted them as kids and into adulthood:

- a) Improved Confidence and Independence
- b) Outdoor Affinity
- c) Life Skills
- d) Positive Relationships

Each theme is a smaller portion of what creates an overall *foundational experience* for the rest of a camper's life as describe in the following sections.

Improved Confidence and Independence

Throughout the study all participants shared examples of how their camp experience improved their confidence and willingness to assume independence. Their responses supported findings presented by Henderson et al. (2007); "A large percentage of parents reported that the camp experience provided opportunities for their child to develop self-confidence by facing new adventures and building new skills" (pg. 990). One participant stated, in reference to his counselors on a rainy multi-day mountain biking trip:

"But to their credit they were pushing us a little bit, obviously through the rain and all. Into the second and the third day I felt like I was getting stronger, pushing my own limits, and getting that confidence up."

Many participants, such as the two below, linked gaining of confidence to relationships with counselors:

"The one thing that would have been most memorable was the self-confidence that you get from the people that were... Well, generation is the wrong word because they weren't a generation, but one camp generation older than me that I always looked up to. It was a confidence thing that when they said hey, you can do something basic like rappel or kayak in whitewater... The confidence they gave me to do those things, I mean to this day, they last."

When asked "Did camp affect your willingness to assume independence as a kid, and if so how so," all participants provided overwhelmingly positive responses. Generally, they all responded *that's part of the reason you go, so you can be independent and learn on your own*. This participant stated that it had shaped her independence as an adult:

"I felt like it helped me with my independence, even down to going to the outhouse at night. I feel like I'm very independent now and that [camp] helped shape some of my independence."

Outdoor Affinity

One of the more clear functions of an outdoor adventure camp is to provide outdoor experiences in which campers learn hard skills about different outdoor activities. Hard skills, here, are defined as physical and technical skills that are used in outdoor pursuits. The entire group of past campers all stated that to this day, they have a great appreciation for the outdoors and still use skills that they learned at camp. It appears that other scholarly articles don't address the lifelong use of hard skills and the creation of lifelong outdoor enthusiasts that was apparent in this study. Though, Garst et al. (2011) highlights that one of the well documented areas of growth from camps is environmental awareness. A few participants claimed that their career and educational paths in the outdoors were chosen based on their

experiences at camp like the one below. This participant was asked what the highest educational degree he had attained:

"Bachelor of Arts in Outdoor Recreation Management which again, I would probably attribute a good portion of why I did that to camp."

While some participants ended up pursuing outdoor industry positions as a career, even those who did not expressed great interest in the outdoors and generally described the outdoors as a *sanctuary*. This participant summarized well the responses of the whole group:

"I think that in instilled in me a lifelong love of the outdoors and being in an outdoor environment, and finding activities to do outdoors. I think it also instilled in me a desire to participate in outdoor activities with other people and an ability to make friends with other people that I might not see on a regular basis."

Similarly, a participant that was a camper nearly twenty years after the one above stated:

"Specifically for me it was the one time [of the year] when I got really sort of engrossed in nature and sort of the environmental world, if you will. You know, my fellow campers and counselors challenged me to push the boundaries of what I was comfortable with in terms of survival skills and thinking about conservation and how to preserve you know, our earth for future generations and things like that. So, that was really the first place I started thinking about those things."

Every interview contained quotes similar to those above, discussing their love for the outdoors and all of the skills they had learned to recreate in the outdoors.

Life Skills

Participants had a variety of opportunities at camp to develop social and thinking skills, or skills that are used in everyday life. One participant explicitly stated that *"I think a lot of life skills came from camp."* All participants specifically highlighted that it made them more accepting of other people and their differences. Many also highlighted how their social skills, thinking skills, and ability to accept others transferred into their adult lives, for example two stated that:

"Every time I go on a trip I'm learning skills that I learned at camp, and beyond that just acceptance. I work a job everyday where my ability to accept others is challenged every day. I work in the criminal justice system and so just being able to think outside the box and think a lot of these skills kind of started developing at camp."

"I learned a great deal about interpersonal skills, about how I get along with people and how to make friends and accept other people. And then I think I learned some really, you know, important life lessons about respecting the outdoors respecting other people, instead of complaining about something trying to figure out a way to fix something."

This study supports previous research that suggested camps help children improve their social and thinking skills. (Henderson et al, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007).

Positive Relationships

The most noticeable themes throughout the interviews was the mention of two different types of positive relationships:

- 1) Peer Relationships
- 2) Camper- Counselor Relationships

Peer Relationships. The development and importance of relationships with peers at camp throughout the experience was extremely important to the individuals within the study. Every single participant mentioned that they had made *life-long friends*. As most individuals noted the trend began as a camper and continued into staff employment:

"Yeah and as I continued on and up until I became a counselor, you know, I kept meeting knew people and still today those people are my best friends."

General phrases such as *my best friends are from camp* and *I went with people from my hometown and that strengthened those relationships* were common. Garst and Bruce (2003) found that making new friends was the number one benefit of camp and results in this study support that making friends was very important to this group of past campers.

Camper-Counselor Relationships. The enthusiasm in which these past campers spoke about their counselors was more powerful than any other section of the interviews. The importance of the camper-counselor relationship may be the key to determining why youth see many of the benefits that they do from camp experiences. For example, this man expressed how truly important to him that the relationship with his counselors was:

"My dad was an alcoholic and my family had a lot of issues, so I had some health problems. For me, the 13 or 14 year, old all the way until I was 22 to have this band of brothers taking me in had a huge impact on me. I think the impact comes from having a sense of belonging, having somewhere you're part of the gang and these people you look up to take you in."

Others commented:

"Counselors were great at giving you confidence and encouraging you."

"So with counselors, the mentors of my life basically have been the counselors that lead those adventure trips"

"Having somebody older really take an interest in you, and teach you things, and respect what you say and respect your decisions to try things out or not try things out- it was sort of liberating."

Garst et al (2011) said "A supportive program climate, for example, promotes social inclusiveness, thereby supporting youth's needs for belonging with a program setting" (pg. 74). The comments from participants frequently drew attention to the fact that the counselors were supportive and inclusive, thereby providing campers with a sense that they *belonged* at camp. That sense of belonging and the relationships that they had built kept all of those campers coming back to continue reaping the benefits that camp could provide as this participant stated:

"I think that that was a critical part of my enjoyment of camp and a significant part of going back to camp repeatedly every summer. I think as a young camper I experienced some home sickness and apprehensiveness and the relationship with the junior staff and the senior staff was critical in helping me get over those kinds of fears that you'd expect a younger camper to have. And I think that they were always there as a big brother or father figure, you know when you're away at a residential camp. I think that the staff that were in my tents and my cabins you know were always keeping an eye on me, you know, making sure I was always involved in things. Not letting me feel, you know, keeping me from feeling alone at times when I was there with people I didn't know. As I got older and became an older camper I looked to the staff for examples of how to

conduct myself in the outdoors, how do I do this activity, you know learn by example from them."

This quote, as others do, draws attention to the fact that counselors are mentors and role models for youth.

Limitations

The use of retrospective interviewing within this study creates potential for answers that may not be completely accurate regarding the reality of their childhood experience at this camp. After such a significant amount of time has passed, it is likely that the participants do not fully remember the period in their life to which this study is inquiring. Further interference could be created by the fact that many of the participants became staff members at the camp after attending as a camper. Memories and feelings that were accumulated during the more recent experience as a staff member could have been unintentionally reported to the researchers as memories and feelings from experiences as a camper youth. While it is hard to pinpoint 100% accurate data based on childhood experience from participants ten or more years later, the camp had a clear positive impact. Whether the lifelong impact was created as a camper or staff member, or both, cannot be fully determined.

Discussion

The outcomes of summer camps are well documented (Bialeschki et al, 2002; Brannan et al., 2000; Dworken, 1999; Dworken, 2001; Henderson et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007) with past studies state that youth and counselors benefit in a variety of ways, such as positive identity, independence, leadership, making friends, social comfort, peer relationships, positive values, spirituality, adventure and exploration, and environmental awareness. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by taking the long-term retrospective angle on the outcomes of past campers' experiences and through the results of the study, which support earlier research on the importance of relationships to the impacts of the camp experience.

Independence, improved confidence, social skills, and thinking skills are some of the earliest documented benefits of the camp experience (Dworken, 2001; Henderson et al. 2007). Interestingly, our findings suggest these skills persist and transfer, at least in the minds of our participants (they may not use them regularly but have retained the knowledge), throughout the teenage years and long into adulthood. While many participants used the word "confidence" to define what they felt improved, they specifically stated an activity and the confidence that they could participate in that activity at a high level. As stated by Bandura (1997), "A self-efficacy assessment, therefore, includes both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief" (p. 382). If a participant says that they strongly believed they could participate in a specific activity at a higher level, by definition, they are actually referring to improved self-efficacy. These findings are rooted in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which have been furthered by Redmond (2010), noting four critical processes: Self-Observation, Self-Evaluation, Self-Reaction, and Self-Efficacy. As detailed herein and from others, camps provide an excellent controlled environment to continuously observe, evaluate, and react to one's self because children can test different behaviors on the same people and within the same setting. These processes leads to improved self-efficacy, or what many in the study referred to as "confidence."

As stated by Collado et al. (2013), "Many of the factors that seem to have an impact on children's environmental attitudes are present in nature sleepover camps" (pg. 38). Returning to this type of residential camp as a kid every year and being exposed to what Hungerford and Volk (1990) describes as "entry-level variables" (pg. 11) toward "environmental citizenship behavior" creates pro-environmental individuals. This camp's culture of environmental appreciation and ecological-based activities, which is espoused and delivered by staff members, likely provided campers with ecological knowledge that promote a higher level of environmental sensitivity. The impact that staff members might have on this is well supported by the early works of Tanner (1980) and later exploration by Chawla (1998), noting the importance of older role models in propagating environmental awareness, ethics, and socialization. These factors are critical entry-level variables described in Hungerford and Volk's (1990) model for fostering pro-environmental citizenship behavior. As found by Rhodes and Dubois (2008), "Recent research indicates that mentoring programs are likely to be effective to the extent that they are successful in establishing close, enduring connections that promote positive developmental change" (pg. 257).

A third theme stemmed from participants' frequently mentioning of the valuable social and thinking skills that they acquired while at camp. The acquiring of social and thinking skills, here titled "life skills," is also based on Bandura's (1971) work, be it Social Learning Theory. As Bandura (1971) stated, "in the social learning system, new patterns of behavior can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behavior of others" (p. 3). Multiple quotes refer to idolizing counselors and acting as they had acted. As articulated by our participants, campers learned behaviors from their counselors. One explanation may be that campers learned these skills from one another in addition to their counselors based on the basic idea of Social Learning Theory.

As many participants indicated, their relationships with their counselors (mentors) lasted at least every summer as a kid and helped them in gaining new skills, confidence, and friendships. The camper-counselor relationship, which began to be explored by Henderson (2012), and the importance of unstructured time at this camp may have *created the perfect environment for my brain to grow and flourish*, as one participant stated. As noted above, the camper-counselor relationship had a great impact on youth because an older individual, often someone seen as a role model, was taking an interest in him or her. Coming from the initial relationship comes three factors; mentorship, teaching, friendship. Many of these past campers stated that counselor's encouragement has improved their confidence, that they would look to counselors to learn how to conduct themselves, and that their counselors had taught them valuable skills. Therefore, a great deal of what children are gaining both initially and in the long term comes either directly or indirectly from the relationship with their counselors. For example, one participant detailed that:

"I really can't even kind of put into words sometimes how much camp has probably affected me. As a camper and as a staff and the relationships with the people there. The attitude of the staff, the just general overall attitude that Nickels, Nate and Nickels, have going on there at camp."

The mentality of the staff at this camp appears to create relationships that provide lifelong impacts.

Every participant stated that unstructured time had improved their experience at camp when asked "Was unstructured time beneficial or did it hinder your camp experience?" Most felt very strongly about its benefits as this individual did:

"I think that it was very beneficial and probably one of the reasons why camp was so enjoyable and why I kept going back. The down time is where you got to build relationships and especially as you get older figure out on your own what you're going to do outdoors. And so that freedom, especially in the younger, early teenage years the freedom of trying to figure out what to do and not have somebody telling you what to do I think was a pretty good learning experience."

While counselors spend time helping youth develop life skills, hard skills, and confidence, unstructured time provided an opportunity for children to be independent and learn on their own, with their peers. The time spent learning with their peers bolstered those relationships contributing to the potential for the lifelong friendships that all of the participants gained from this particular camp.

Conclusion

While small in scope, this study provides a unique lens to look through the recollections and memories of adults on their childhood experiences at a residential summer camp. While our findings converge with other studies that are more short-term in their assessment, it also strengthens recent work that highlights the significance of the camper-counselor relationship. Additionally, this study underscores the value of free, unstructured time, a variable that is in serious deficit in modern society, particularly amongst youth (Louv, 2008). Future research that investigates the significance of staff relations and the correlation between staff tenure/turnover with the camper-staff relationship may prove critical in understanding how this develops. Additionally, research that compares the outcomes of the camp experience between those that are highly structured with small amounts of discretionary time and those that provide campers with freedom and autonomy through unstructured time may provide fascinating lessons for future programming design considerations. In any amount, both our research and that of others seems to strongly indicate that *camp changes lives*.

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