

“But I want to go home!”  
A qualitative exploration of the experience of summer camp from two contrasting  
perspectives

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

The mention of the term “summer camp” often brings to mind cabins nestled in the woods, cool lakes, warm campfires and children having fun as they swim, paddle and play. At traditional residential camps children are imagined to revel in their freedom, overcome challenges, make long lasting friendships and develop into skilled and competent young people. How much of this imagery, however, is based upon a societal discourse constructed by adult values? How often do the actual experiences match these ideals? This study explores the issue of adult driven discourses surrounding the experience of camp by comparing the perspective of camp directors with the description of one of the author’s own childhood experiences. Using narrative techniques, the author composed two distinct descriptions of the camp experience including programmatic, social and emotional elements. The comparison of these two narratives revealed the possibility for distinct differences between the adult perception of the experience and how it may actually be experienced by a child. The areas of difference centred around both social and programming elements of camp participation which, when considered together, suggest the need for children to adjust to a distinctly different social setting in order to achieve the positive experiences reflected in our cultural conceptualization of summer camp.

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# Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>But I wanna go home!</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Prologue (<i>Introduction</i>)</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Other perspectives (<i>Related literature</i>)</b> .....	<b>7</b>
3.1	Introduction.....	7
3.2	Cultural studies .....	7
3.3	Family Leisure .....	10
3.4	Social perceptions of childhood.....	12
3.5	Childhood in leisure research.....	18
3.6	Camp research.....	21
3.7	Conclusions.....	24
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Process (<i>Methods</i>)</b> .....	<b>26</b>
4.1	Autoethnography.....	26
4.2	Creative Analytic Practice: .....	29
4.3	Writing as Inquiry .....	34
4.4	Counter-narratives.....	36
4.5	My perspective, my research process .....	37
4.5.1	What do you mean I can't call home? .....	39
4.5.2	More than just having fun in the woods, camp is... ..	43
4.6	Evaluation .....	47
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Two sides to every story (<i>Findings</i>)</b> .....	<b>54</b>
5.1	<i>What do you mean I can't call home?</i> .....	54
5.2	<i>More than just having fun in the woods, camp is...</i> .....	85
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Questioning the currents: <i>the reflections of a hippy kid struggling to find understanding in the mainstream</i> (<i>Discussion</i>)</b> .....	<b>97</b>
6.1	People.....	100
6.2	Program.....	116
6.3	Camp is a different place: people adjusting to the program .....	124
6.4	Call for future research .....	128
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Closing thoughts (<i>Conclusion</i>)</b> .....	<b>130</b>
	<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>131</b>

**References** ..... 146

## 1.0 But I wanna go home!

Midsummer dusk settled in as we made our way down a dirt road. We moved quickly, glancing behind almost frantically as we continued down the narrow track.

“Maybe we should just hide in the corn,” said Joe. “So they won’t, you know, find us.”

Even in the failing light, I could still see the evidence of the tears he so rarely shed as his reddened eyes scanned the fields that flanked either side of the camp road.

Glancing at the dark shadows between the rows of stalks that towered over my head, I suppressed a shudder. The thought of giving up and going back crossed my mind until I remembered the angry voices and the lies. No, I wouldn’t go back, but I most certainly did not want to spend the night hiding in some cornfield in the pitch dark not knowing what, or who, was out there too. Images of every movie monster and murderer I had ever seen flashed before my eyes.

“Um,” I hoped he couldn’t hear the fear in my voice, “maybe we should just keep going...I, I think there’s a house at the end of the road.”

“Ok,” he nodded, “we won’t hide unless they come after us” he said, as he turned to look behind us to confirm that, even after several minutes, no one was following us.



## **2.0 Prologue (*Introduction*)**

I never dreamed that two somewhat scruffy hippy kids running away from camp in the early 90's would end up as the foundation of a formal research study, much less the Master's thesis of one of the participants over a decade later. The topic of this study has evolved slowly throughout my experiences in the past year, beginning with a slight discomfort with the topic of a research assistantship and culminating in this qualitative exploration of issues involving perception, power, child development and cultural values in a "traditional" leisure setting.

With an entirely different topic in mind for my thesis, a quantitative assessment of a program for youth-at-risk, I began working as a research assistant on the "Canadian Summer Camp Research Project" in the winter of 2007. Given that my own experiences at camp included both highly positive and highly negative experiences, I was interested in the topic of the study, but a little uncertain as to whether or not the findings would be consistent with my own experiences. As part of my participation in this research, I attended the Ontario Camping Association conference in February of that year where my supervisor and I interviewed a number of camp directors with the goal of understanding the impact of camp attendance on campers and their conceptualization of the camper's experience while at camp. While participating in this process, I was surprised to find myself feeling quite critical of the directors' descriptions. Based on my history with camp, I had expected to somewhat disagree with their descriptions, but had not anticipated the strength of my reaction to their stories. Because of my own fond memories of some of my camp experiences, and those of friends and family members, I firmly believe that summer camp can be a very positive leisure experience for children and that it can certainly contribute a great deal to their overall development and growth. So why did I feel so at odds with

what the directors were saying? With a busy interview schedule and my own schoolwork to complete, I put my uncertainty about these reactions aside and continued with the work at hand.

Later, while using the interview data for a class assignment, I remembered my critical reactions and found that they only increased as I explored the data more deeply. Why was I so upset by the sense that their descriptions were missing something? Even as a fledgling researcher, I understood and accepted that we all experience life differently and have different ways of looking at phenomena. At least, I thought I did. So why was I having such a strong reaction?

I came to realize that I was reacting to a lack of serious empathy in the descriptions of the directors. I responded quite emotionally to the idea that these people who are responsible for such potentially important experiences in children's lives were not in touch with what these experiences actually feel like for the participant. To use the phrase employed by Duan and Hill (1996) in their review of psychological literature involving empathy, it appeared to me that the directors exhibited "intellectual empathy" (p. 263), described as "the cognitive process" of identifying the emotions experienced by another. What I felt was missing from their descriptions, however, was the affective side of the empathetic experience, what Duan and Hill call "empathetic emotion" (p. 263): the process of responding to the emotions of others by experiencing similar emotions.

For most adults, identifying the emotions potentially experienced by another in a given situation should be a relatively straightforward process, depending on the complexity of said situation, personal experience and the relationship between the adult and the subject. To actively emotionally empathize with someone else, to imagine what those emotions actually feel like from another's perspective, however, takes more purposeful focus and reflection. It was this type

of deeper emotional empathy that I felt was lacking in the directors' descriptions. This criticism is not to say that I think the directors do not care for the feelings of their campers. It appeared to me that they did not seem to have tried, or were at least unsuccessful at, understanding the experience from the emotional perspective of a child. The recognition of this lack of empathy somewhat resolved the internal conflict I felt over the directors' interviews: I was still not wholly satisfied by their description of campers' experiences, but I no longer felt confused about my reaction.

My own camp experiences have ranged from being a counsellor for several years in the same program and attending various residential camps to quitting other camps and running away from a residential camp that would not allow my cousin and me to phone home. Looking back, my positive camp experiences involved programs that were empathetic, supportive and respectful of the campers' needs and desires, while the negative experiences almost always resulted from the absence of these elements. As I thought about these topics more and more, I found myself discussing them with friends and colleagues. In these discussions, I found that the issue of empathizing with children's emotional experiences and, perhaps more importantly, valuing their experiences and respecting their opinions, desires and needs as they express them, was an area where my opinions met a great deal of opposition. The common responses I heard emphasized the importance of overall outcomes and results of participation, the negative outcomes of non-participation, and the valuing of parents' views over the immediate emotional responses and experiences of children.

This ongoing conflict between what I saw as important and the common responses affected me quite deeply and resulted in several heated arguments with friends, family and colleagues in which neither side seemed to "get" what the other was saying. Reflecting on this

conflict, I realized that at the heart of the matter, my beliefs about children, their needs and abilities and the roles of adults in meeting those needs, were quite different from those of many of the people with whom I spoke. Compounding this conflict of ideas was the fact that when I questioned their ideas and challenged specific elements, the best response I received was essentially “that’s just the way it is”. I thus discovered that my views on the subject of children, self-determination, and their right to choose their leisure activities were running in direct conflict to the dominant social discourse (Hall, 1997), which seemed to value future outcomes and parental needs over the immediate experiences of children.

Camp research in general has, until very recently, been seriously lacking any substantial examination of the experience in and of itself. Much research has focused on specific areas of development affected by camp attendance (Anshel, Muller, & Owens, 1986; Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Shewchuk, 1986; Hans, 2000; Henderson, Bialeschki, & James, 2007; Readdick & Schaller, 2005; Sherer, 1980), especially for children with special needs (Elad, Yagil, Cohen, & Meller, 2003; Goodwin & Staples, 2005; Hanson & Deysach, 1977; Hill & Sibthorp, 2006; Hrenko, 2005; Hunter, Rosnov, Koontz, & Roberts, 2006). Others have used camp as a setting for psychological and/or sociological study (Kane, Baltes, & Moss, 2001; Moore, 2002; Owens, Stahl, Patton, Reddy, & Crouch, 2006; Yuen, Pedlar, & Mannell, 2005). Very little has been documented about how campers experience and feel about their time at camp.

In an attempt to further explore and understand this uncharted area of the childhood camp experience, this study utilizes examples from my own life in combination with the camp directors’ descriptions of the camp experience to explore the topic using writing itself as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000). The purpose of this study is to explore one of the dominant adult discourses surrounding children’s experiences of summer camp through the

use of narrative descriptions of both a dominant perspective and a counter narrative. This study utilizes interviews with camp directors and my own childhood experience to explore one of the dominant cultural perspectives on children's experiences at summer camp.

As the autoethnography is based on my experience at a "traditional", wilderness based residential camp, I have selected interviews only with directors who work at these types of camps to use in the dominant narrative. Throughout this paper, therefore, when I refer to "camp" I will be speaking about these types of programs, and unless otherwise noted, I will not be including day camps or specialty camps in my discussion as these programs can include very different programming goals and structures which are not included in the scope of this study.

For the sake of simplicity and parsimony, throughout this paper I will be using the terms "children" and "child" to refer anyone who is younger than an adult. This is to say that I will use these terms to encompass babies, younger children, adolescents and youths unless there is a need to refer to an individual age group. I have made this decision based on the fact that, while there are distinct differences between these groups, they are often grouped together, as non-adults, in both social conceptualizations and research.

### **3.0 Other perspectives (*Related literature*)**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In preparing for this study, I have explored five primary areas of previous research: cultural studies theories, family leisure, the discourse of childhood, children's leisure and summer camp. Through the review of this related research, I have come to understand the current field of knowledge relating to my work, as well as a clearer understanding of the dominant discourse surrounding my topic as it is both directly discussed and indirectly displayed in the structural/linguistic and substantive content of related literature.

#### **3.2 Cultural studies**

Within the framework of cultural studies, issues of meaning, social construction and representation are a primary focus. Studies in this area explore how culture is shaped and formed and how it, in turn, shapes and forms our understanding of the world around us. Cultural theorists acknowledge and explore the inherent subjectivity of human communication and the manner in which our cultural perspectives can impact upon, influence and shape how we think, and therefore act. Dynamics of power and an understanding of how these dynamics can shape knowledge through culture are often also included in cultural studies research.

The term discourse, as it is described in cultural studies literature, refers to a dominant social ideology or perspective that shapes and affects how members of that society speak, think and act in regard to a particular topic (Hook, 2001). Originally posited by Foucault, the concept of dominant social discourse stems from issues of representation and the relationship between

power and knowledge. The term representation in this field refers to “the production of meaning through language” (Hall, 1997, p. 28). Simply put, the dominant discourse reflects the perspective of the dominant social group relative to the given topic and dictates what is the “truth” about that subject through the assignment of meaning (Foucault, 1971).

Much of Foucault’s work focused on the dominant discourse surrounding complex social issues such as mental health, sexuality and justice and how the distribution of power in our society limits our understanding of these topics by holding only the perspective of the dominant group as a valid representation of the truth, excluding the views of the marginalized populations involved (Foucault, 1971). Foucault also studied the role of the subject in cultural discourse outlining that discourse not only defines members of a culture as subjects, classifying them based upon specific attributes (i.e., criminals are evil, doctors are good), but also places each subject in a position from which the discourse makes the most sense (Hall, 1997; Madigan, 1992). It is only through these positions that subjects are afforded meaning within the discourse and they risk the possibility of losing that meaning if they reject that positioning, resulting in those members of society who refute the discourse or step outside of its boundaries being discredited and marginalized and, essentially, left powerless. In this manner, the dominant group maintains its power by maintaining its control over knowledge and dissenting members.

The use of assimilation and placating statements or philosophies without supporting action or behavioural change is another manner by which the dominant group can maintain its power even as popular ideologies begin to shift. This type of “doublespeak” has been noted in the recent literature as popular opinion has begun to emphasize the need for inclusion and respect for diversity while institutional discourses struggle to maintain their goals, which focus on uniformity and homogeneity (Blackledge, 2001; Rolfe, 2002). These articles highlight situations

in which institutional agencies have expounded support for issues of diversity and acceptance of other cultural and ideological perspectives while also maintaining contradictory exclusionary practices and values.

Foucault's theories have been widely applied in cultural studies research, but few studies have applied them to research involving children. His theories have been suggested to have therapeutic potential for families insofar as they have focused on the subjectivity of the individuals' identities and external discursive perspectives (Madigan, 1992), parental discourses relating to family leisure activities (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and helping adolescents contextualize their experiences (Chambers, Hoskins, & Pence, 1999). Individual facets of the discourse surrounding childhood have also been included in recent research in a limited capacity. This research has touched upon the topic of discourse as it is reflected in topics such as the values displayed in education systems (Blackledge, 2001), and the debate surrounding the implementation of school uniforms (Bodine, 2003). These studies, however, were primarily dealing with other issues, using the concept of discourse and its related components as only a minor part of their research. One study I reviewed examined the growth of the educational infant toy market and found that it appeared to be linked to a shift in discourse. This shift in discourse was based upon current scientific perspectives on infant development and what the author labelled "middle class values", which emphasized that "good" parents must strive to offer their children specific interventions which stimulate development in the hopes of maximizing their children's potential (Nadesan, 2002). Another set of researchers have focused on bringing Foucault's theories of the linkages between power and knowledge into the classroom and altering educational practices to bring counter perspectives into the discourse taught in public schools (MacNaughton, 2005).



It would appear, however, that there has been very little research conducted specifically to explore the discourse surrounding childhood and its impact on children's lives. My study will explore a small area of this discourse by not only describing it as it is reflected in adult descriptions of the camp experience, but also by offering a counter perspective and encouraging readers to reflect upon the discourse and its impact on their own ideas of childhood.

### **3.3 Family Leisure**

While this study is only addressing children attending camp on their own and not the new movement of "family camps", the topic of family leisure is still relevant. This area of the literature review includes several key elements that relate to children's leisure and their participation in summer camp. Societal expectations about leisure, the roles and responsibilities of parents, and parents' own values surrounding leisure all impact upon children's leisure both indirectly through socialization and directly through parental influence over and, in many cases, control of children's participation. The issues of dominant adult values and perspectives on children's leisure in general are also important to this study as they contribute a great deal to the dominant discourse surrounding camp.

To date, there has been little research conducted which addresses the issue of family leisure participation in and of itself (Shaw, 2008). Research has explored the relationship between parenthood and adults' leisure (e.g. Brown, Brown, Miller, & Hansen, 2001; Crawford & Huston, 1993; Freysinger, 1994; Wearing, 1990) with much emphasis being placed on gender roles and how being a parent impacts upon the overall leisure patterns of individuals. This research, however, has largely ignored how families recreate together and how parents view their children's leisure.

What has been found in recent research examining family leisure patterns, however, is a distinct focus on developmental outcomes and parental desire for “beneficial” leisure activities. This predominant pattern of purposive leisure described by parents touches on themes of child development and the desire to maximize children’s potential through developmental experiences (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Shaw, 2008). Linked with the “middle-class attitude” towards parenting, which Nadesan (2002) described in her study of infant toy markets, this parental focus on developmental leisure seems to tap into a cultural desire to offer our children optimal childhood experiences with the hope of fostering excellence and of obtaining a distinct advantage in today’s competitive job market. This parental focus on providing stimulating experiences has been found to go beyond simply wanting what is best for one’s child to becoming a criterion on which we judge parenting ability, both through the opportunities provided for children and the ultimate success of children in later life (Coakley, 2006; Furedi, 2001; Nadesan, 2002; Shaw, 2008). This societal pressure results in individuals feeling that it is their responsibility as parents to be involved in their children’s leisure and ensure that their children experience participation that fosters physical activity, social skill development and positive family values (Shaw, 2008). This study by Shaw (2008) also found that parents choose leisure activities based upon the developmental benefits they see their children gaining through participation, rather than enjoyment or preferences. Linking this discourse with sports participation in particular, Coakley (2006) found that our society has begun “linking the character and achievements of children to the moral worth of parents” (pg. 153). The dominant discourse surrounding children in family leisure, therefore, appears to be focused on extrinsic benefits and developmental outcomes, rather than more traditional leisure benefits such

as self-actualization, pleasure, relaxation and expression of self (Mannell, 1999; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

Parents, especially mothers, have also reported that family leisure is often more work-like than purely leisure-like as it usually results in an increase in their domestic responsibilities through the need for planning, preparation, juggling of schedules and the struggle to make sure everyone “has a good time” (Shaw, 1992; Shaw, in press). This increased workload, coupled with personal and social expectations to offer their children appropriate experiences, results in a great deal of pressure on parents and requires that a considerable amount of their time be devoted to family leisure. Also noted in the paper by Shaw (in press) is the fact that parents see family vacations as a way to increase family leisure participation, while decreasing their workload stress as they offer “a relief from everyday family chores” (pg. 17). While this research speaks to how adults view family leisure and their preferences, I will explore the degree of impact of this adult perspective on the leisure experiences of children in a later section of this paper.

### **3.4 Social perceptions of childhood**

As the dominant discourses surrounding children’s participation in summer camp is inextricably linked to the discourse of children’s leisure and, indeed, the current discourse surrounding childhood in and of itself, I will explore the current research on both topics before moving to the literature involving camp directly. Reflecting on terms like “children’s rights” and “protection of children”, we tend to think about severe situations involving abuse, child labour or slavery, often seen as occurring in foreign, “developing” nations. A review of recent literature focusing on the social status of children in so called “developed” countries, however, indicates a growing acknowledgement that children are not afforded the same consideration we give adults.

Many researchers have found that children are treated as “second class” citizens in most western cultures in a manner which essentially portrays them as lesser individuals than adults. Likened by Chambers et al. (1999) to “women and other marginalized groups,” children and adolescents “are constantly deprived of agency and autonomy...their subject status is always partial, conditional and never guaranteed” (pg. 397). Considered a lesser group by the dominant adults, children are consistently excluded from decisions that directly impact upon their lives (Davis & Hill, 2006). This lack of participation and self-determination is reflected in a growing trend of over-regulation of children’s free time and general lack of independent identity as citizens. Davis and Hill (2006) observed in their review of related literature, as an introduction to a text on social inclusion of children, that our society has done a reasonable job maintaining children’s right relating to protection and provision. These authors go on to note, however, that children’s rights to liberty and expression, as outlined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are largely dismissed as being inappropriate because of the dominant perspective that holds them as cognitively incapable of exercising these rights in an appropriate manner. The general treatment of children and the amount of respect afforded to them has also been labelled as “deficient”, with adults’ attitudes being acknowledged to be at times caring and concerned, but at other times indifferent and disdainful (Saunders & Goddard, 2001).

Mayall (2006) expands on this perspective, which designates children as distinctly different from adults, by exploring the discourse surrounding childhood and how it is reflected in concepts such as truancy and compulsory school attendance. Considering the different attitudes and social policies that address children’s school attendance and adults’ employment, Mayall highlights the general values reflected in the different attitudes held towards “a truant”, seen as a delinquent, and an adult who “calls in sick” when they wish to have the day off, a practice

generally deemed relatively harmless when used in moderation. This difference in the values directed towards similar “occupational” duties of children and adults reflect a general social trend in which what is accepted practice for adults dealing with children would not be considered acceptable if they were dealing with capable adults.

Legislation and social mores regarding children, punishment, and freedom also reflect this distinct cultural difference in regard to the treatment of children and adults. The dominant discourse regarding acceptable treatment of children is reflected in specific practices such as the legal status of spanking (Raaflaub, 2007), and the assumption that parents may, and in many cases should, force their children to participate in virtually any activities deemed “in their best interest” (Flekkoy, 2002). Similar behaviours directed at other adults, however, would be seen as inappropriate, if not illegal. This acceptance of protecting children’s futures through present adult decisions can result in a wide range of forced participation or limitations on behaviour such as participating in specific leisure practices (i.e., piano or swimming lessons) or the choice of schools, educational streams or involuntary treatment programs (i.e., “boot camps”).

Obviously, given children’s limited understanding of consequences and the long term impact of their behaviours, there are times when parents must intervene to avoid detrimental outcomes (Ladd, 2002). Several studies have shown, however, that children are in fact capable of reasonable decision making beyond general social expectations (Ladd, 2002; Mayall, 2006). Ladd (2002) suggests that the utilization of adult or parental control moves beyond necessary protection and provision and often interferes with children’s self-determination in areas not directly related to their primary health and/or safety. The purpose of my study is not to question the necessity of adults having control over the actions of children, but to explore current

dominant ideas concerning power and the conceptualization of children's leisure, as it is manifested in the experience of camp.

This distinct difference between societal considerations towards adults and children is also noted in the language used when discussing child abuse, which continues to employ "depersonalizing" pronouns such as "it" or "its" when describing child victims in formal documents (Saunders & Goddard, 2001). While formal language used in official documents is often distinctly different from everyday terminology, this particular difference is rather meaningful. While the authors do not describe the intended purpose of this practice, perhaps it is used just to avoid cluttering the text with "his/her" or "he or she" if the sex of the child is not disclosed, or to diminish the horrific reality of this type of report by distancing the reader from the subject, the continuation of this practice nonetheless highlights the fact that the adults involved find this dehumanizing of children acceptable. A British author also noted the acceptance of "socialization techniques which draw heavily on violence and humiliation" (Taylor, 1998, p. 52) indicate the low social status of children in western societies.

Our education system, which focuses predominantly on future success and specific outcomes, also reflects this general devaluation of children's right to freedom and expression for the sake of their futures (Bodine, 2003; Mayall, 2006). In Bodine's (2003) exploration of parents' attitudes towards the implementation of uniform policies in elementary and middle schools, she found that parents opposed to the uniforms cited their children's rights to express themselves through their choice of clothing. In the article, Bodine then pointed out that these parents did not raise similar complaints against school policies that infringed on their children's freedom in other matters such as chewing gum, moving around or the restriction of adult values applied to how they participated in art. Bodine went on to explain that it seemed to be the

innovative nature of the uniforms that upset the parents, that they accepted other infringements on children's rights as long as they were seen to be part of the "custom" of the school setting; as long as the infringements matched the parents' understanding of the discourse of "school", parents did not see it necessary to complain.

The dominant discourse surrounding children in our society today appears, therefore, to be congruent with the themes found in the study of family leisure. Adults are primarily focused on children's achievement and long term success and feel that these issues are more important than the child's individual preference or actual experience. The dehumanizing of children and disregard for their individual wishes, desires and needs, which is justified by emphasis on their inability to understand and adult values regarding their "best interests", are of particular importance in this study as these values are directly related to the discourse surrounding the summer camp experience.

Finding myself once again in need of qualifying my approach, I would like to note that this review of the literature is not intended to suggest that parents and other adults regularly act with malice towards children. My perspective on this literature is that despite caring and concerned adults who do love and cherish the children they are in contact with, the dominant cultural ideology surrounding childhood in our society is one that does not hold children in a position worthy of the same respect as adults. It is the pervasive and covert nature of the dominant discourse that results in adults perpetuating this attitude towards children, despite their best intentions. As discussed in the section on cultural theory, the nature of these cultural elements makes it very difficult for those functioning within the discourse to understand its limitations and influences. An example of this impact of discursive formations is the parents in the school uniform debate; they were angered by the infringement on their children's right to choose their

own clothes, but did not consider other limitations inappropriate because they were intrinsic to their cultural understanding of what school is like.

There are, however, many individuals who do strive to challenge this discourse of childhood. In the education arena, Summerhill school in England and the Albany Free School in Albany, New York, are based upon a philosophy of respecting children and adults in an equal manner, trusting that children are capable of making decisions, with some guidance, in regard to what is best for their development (Albany Free School; Neill, 1992). Other organizations that follow principles of attachment or empathic parenting techniques also challenge the dominant discourse and encourage parents and caregivers to treat children with respect and empathy, emphasizing the adult role of guidance and cooperation resulting in positive development, rather than teaching and directing (Attachment Parenting International, 2007; Jalbert, 2001; Mothering Magazine, no date).

From this perspective, I intend to challenge the dominant discourse. Having been raised in an alternative household, homeschooled and encouraged to think critically, especially when anyone said “that’s just the way it is”, I feel that I have a somewhat unique perspective. I consider myself to have, at least somewhat, rejected the position offered me by dominant perspectives and have often found myself in conflict with others over a disagreement that is irresolvable because we accept different truths about the topic of the discussion. From this outsider perspective, I will challenge the dominant discourse surrounding summer camp as it relates to this discourse that dehumanizes children in our society .



### **3.5 Childhood in leisure research**

The representation of children in the field of leisure research has, to this date, been somewhat confined to specific areas. A majority of the research focuses on the outcomes children and youth experience relating to their leisure participation (e.g. Caldwell & Darling, 1999; Harrell, 1997; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Mannell, Zuzanek, & Aronson, 2005; Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1995; Zuzanek, Mannell, & Hilbrecht, 2005). A great deal of this type of research focuses on the impact of various elements of leisure participation on physical health in regard to physical activity (e.g. Aarnio, Winter, Peltonen, Kujala, & Kaprio, 2002; Harrell, 1997; Shen, McCaughtry, & Martin, 2007). The issue of reading as leisure has been examined in several studies, which emphasize the importance of this type of leisure in developmental and academic achievement (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Koolstra & van der Voort, T.H.A., 1996; Moffitt & Wartella, 1992; S. B. Neuman, 1986; van Schie & Wiegman, 1997). Reflecting the discussion of parental values in studies exploring family leisure participation, parental selection of children's leisure has also reflected a desire for developmental outcomes and the fostering of specific values (Coakley, 2006; Dunn et al., 2003). Other topics such as the gender differences in children's games and the role of modern technology in children and youth's leisure have also been explored (Lever, 1976; Mannell et al., 2005; Zuzanek et al., 2005). For the most part, however, this research has not addressed how children experience their leisure and focuses primarily on adult values of outcomes and development. This finding matches my above findings related to parents' views on family leisure and the dominant adult discourse surrounding childhood.

That being said, children's experiences of leisure have been studied in a limited capacity in studies that examine specific types of leisure. Siegenthaler and Gonzalez (1997), Zuzanek et al.

(2005) and Mannell et al. (2005) have included children and youth experiences of sports and other leisure pursuits within larger studies. All three of these studies report complicated relationships between children and their leisure with findings that indicate the participants' leisure can result in both positive and negative experiences.

Some studies have examined the role of parents in children's leisure and have found that this is an area that requires more attention (W. Hultsman, 1992; Hutchinson, Baldwin, & Caldwell, 2003; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004). While still calling for additional research, the preliminary findings in this area that indicate that parents exert a great deal of influence, if not outright control, over how adolescents spend their free time (Hultsman, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Hutchinson et al., 2003). The limited scope of this research and the absence of any mention of younger children in this area of leisure research, however, could indicate that researchers have not considered it a priority, are uninterested in it as a subject of examination, that it is assumed that it is not important for younger children to experience autonomy in their leisure, or perhaps some other reason I have not considered. Regardless of the reason, to look at this body of research from a Foucauldian perspective, the lack of attention given this topic reflects its general lack of importance within the discourse surrounding leisure; there appears to be little importance attached to the degree of self-determination in children's leisure participation.

Studies conducted over the past twenty years with the intention of describing consumer tourism decisions have found that, while children are often influential in decisions made regarding family tourism, parents remain the ultimate decision makers (Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Seaton, 1995; Swinyard, 1987; Turley, 2001; Wang et al., 2004). While this cannot be said to definitively relate to the decisions made about everyday leisure, it suggests that within families, the power dynamics reflect a discourse that places the parents in power.

Further research in the area of sports participation, a major area of children's organized leisure, has indicated that parents exert a great deal of control over children's leisure. While applying the criteria of serious leisure to the field of literature examining children's sports participation, Siegenthaler and Gonzalez (1997) presented an overall description in which it is entirely possible for parents to dominate children's sports participation. While they noted that their study was not referring to all children involved in sport, they suggested that some children's participation in sport is forced or coerced by parents. This study also made repeated references to how parents' personal identification with, and participation in, children's athletic leisure can lead to negative experiences for the children. Participation was also observed to often continue despite a lack of enjoyment, which seems to also indicate that the parents are either directly or indirectly making the choice for the child (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997).

The concept of freedom, or "lack of constraint", has been described as "the most central and commonly agreed upon" (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 107) attribute in the definition of leisure in related literature. Other traits such as self-expression, intrinsic motivation, sense of escape, lack of evaluation, and relaxation are other commonly cited criteria for labelling specific activities or experiences as "leisure" (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Based on these attributes of leisure and the preceding exploration of the literature related to family and children's leisure, it would appear that much of children's leisure does not match the traditional definition of "leisure". If this is indeed true of the phenomenon of children's leisure, and not just a reflection of the limits of current research, children are potentially also missing out on the myriad of psychological benefits of traditional leisure participation such as fun, pleasure, need-compensation, personal growth and actualization, and an important way of coping with life stresses (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

### **3.6 Camp research**

The body of research that focuses on summer camps and similar programs has been largely specialized, examining specialized programs or studying specific psychological outcomes. Much of this research has focused on individual programs and how they help participants achieve specific outcomes. Other studies have focused on psychological processes and traits and have used the camp environment as a setting for observation and/or experimentation.

Summer camps designed for children with special needs have been studied extensively, most often examining specific outcomes linked to the needs of that client group. There has been a great number of studies focusing on camp as a generally therapeutic setting for children with serious illnesses (e.g. Hunter, Rosnov, Koontz, & Roberts, 2006). The use of the camp setting for more specialized therapy has also been studied and found to offer support to children dealing with grief (Hrenko, 2005; Nettina, 2006; Packman et al., 2005; Rich, 2002; Spirito, Forman, Ladd, & Wold, 1992) and the impact of illness and disability on their abilities and recreation participation (Goodwin & Staples, 2005; Hill & Sibthorp, 2006; Hunter et al., 2006; Kleck & DeJong, 1983; Leumann, Mueller, & Leumann, 1989; Meltzer & Rourke, 2005; Michalski, Mishna, Worthington, & Cummings, 2003; Mikami, 2005; Rynders, Schleien, & Mustonen, 1990; Van Wert & Reitz, 1978).

Many researchers have also studied camp participation to measure the specific benefits and outcomes campers experience. Specific studies have explored social outcome areas such as self-esteem and self-concept (Anshel, Muller, & Owens, 1986; Readdick & Schaller, 2005), value and moral development (Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Shewchuk, 1986; Crombie, Walsh, & Trinneer, 2003; Groves & Groves, 1977), family interactions (Smith, Gotlieb, Gurwitch, &

Blotcky, 1987) and the building of community and social capital (Yuen, Pedlar, & Mannell, 2005). More individualized development has also been examined through exploration of the building of sports-related skills and sportsmanship (Hupp & Reitman, 1999; Ponchillia, Armbruster, & Wiebold, 2005) and discussion of human sexuality and acceptance at camp (Sherer, 1980; Vincke & van Heeringen, 2004).

The use of summer camp as a setting for psychological and sociological observation and experimentation is also very common, presumably because it allows researchers to study children in different sized groups over an extended period, without a great deal of adult direction and control limiting their chosen behaviour. Specific examples of this type of research include camps being used to study: race and social interaction (Clare, Bray, Itkin, & Murphy, 1978; Moore, 2001; Moore, 2002; Moore, 2003); homesickness (Thurber, 1995; Thurber & Weisz, 1997; Thurber, 1999; Thurber, 2005; Zimmerman & Bijur, 1995); the effectiveness of interventions and limitations (Blanck & Rosenthal, 1984; Bredemeier et al., 1986; Hanson & Deysach, 1977; Heckel, Hursh, & Hiers, 1977; Michalski et al., 2003; G. E. Taylor & Rickard, 1974); attribution theories (Bukowski & Moore, 1980); small group dynamics in groups of children and youth (Dreikurs, 1987; Feldman, 1974); dependency (Fichman, Koestner, & Zuroff, 1997); predictors and patterns of friendship (Hanna, 1998; Hektner, August, & Realmuto, 2000); goal setting (Kane, Baltes, & Moss, 2001); personality traits of those drawn to the position of counsellor (Loveland, Gibson, Lounsbury, & Huffstetler, 2005); and sleep patterns (Owens, Stahl, Patton, Reddy, & Crouch, 2006).

While not necessarily part of the “camping” literature, extensive research has been conducted on children and youth in wilderness therapy settings. This research has focused on a wide range of programs from addiction recovery (Bennett, Cardone, & Jarczyk, 1998; Kennedy, 1993) to

treatment of trauma (Hyer, Boyd, Scurfield, Smith, & Burke, 1996) and coping with cancer (Elad, Yagil, Cohen, & Meller, 2003; Stevens et al., 2004; Walsh-Burke, 2002). For the most part, this area of research focuses on the outcomes of the wilderness-based therapy, not the impact of the wilderness experience in and of itself.

In agreement with the findings of my review of the literature, Henderson, Bialeschki and James (2007) outline the domination of highly specialized and limited research, which has largely focused on camper outcomes. This overview of camp research highlights another area of camp research that has explored the more concrete mechanistic operations of summer camps. I have largely ignored this topic, however, as it is not related to the psychosocial elements I am examining.

Henderson et al. (2007) cite two large studies recently conducted by the American Camp Association (ACA) that focused on providing empirical evidence of the “conventional wisdom” that camp offers campers meaningful developmental experiences. These studies utilized large-scale quantitative survey methods and included large samples of campers that were representative of the overall demographics of the campers of ACA member-camps. The first study used pre and post participation tests and found several specific areas of outcomes experienced by campers such as identity development, social and physical skill development, values and spirituality (American Camp Association, 2005). The second study had campers fill out surveys while at camp addressing issues of developmental support and opportunities within the camp environment (American Camp Association, n.d.). While both of these studies offer interesting insight into what campers get out of camp, they do not address the question of how campers experience camp. In their meta-analysis, Henderson et al. (2007) point out the need for

research exploring campers' immediate experiences and a need for more individualized and rich data from qualitative studies as well as more quantitative longitudinal measurement of outcomes.

Given the representational limitations of my study, I admit that it will not directly fill this gap in the field of camp research. What it does offer the field, however, is an opportunity to explore and challenge a dominant conceptualization of camp so that in the future, research such as that which Henderson et al. call for will be closer to truly representing children's experiences.

### **3.7 Conclusions**

To step away from the previous research for a moment, and examine this information from a critical Foucauldian perspective, I believe this overview of parental expectations and values surrounding children's leisure and the discourse surrounding childhood itself could contribute to the maintenance of a positive perspective towards camp within the dominant discourse. My extrapolation is based upon Foucault's idea of the link between power and knowledge: if it behoves the dominant social group to continue seeing a phenomenon in a positive light, the values, attitudes and opinions of that culture will reflect that perspective.

In this case, parents want their kids to be exposed to positive, developmentally stimulating activities, but they experience increased stress and time constraints when participating with their children. Being able to send them away to a residential setting where they will participate in a wide range of positive activities generally acknowledged to be "good for kids" seems like an ideal option. This match between the dominant group's needs and the phenomenon of camp could be argued, therefore, to contribute to the dominant discourse surrounding camp. Further research into children's experiences in and of themselves, apart from adult values and expectations, is therefore needed. Additionally, we must strive for further

research into the values and attitudes of adults towards children's leisure in general as it has been demonstrated here that these factors have the potential to shape, limit and control children's experiences in this vital part of human existence.

The values and expectations of parents are also important to this study as it could be argued that they are the true "clients" of summer camps due to their power of decision making in regard to children's leisure; it is the ultimate decision of parents which determines if and where children will attend summer camp. Camps that appeal to parental preferences or needs will, therefore, be more successful.



## **4.0 Process (*Methods*)**

The autoethnographic approach to qualitative research encourages researchers to focus on their own experiences and explore their meanings within a socio-cultural context. The use of writing as inquiry in creative analytical practice (CAP) to both collect and analyze empirical materials allows writers to reflect upon their experiences while also offering the reader the opportunity to empathize and examine the issues being discussed from a different point of view. For this study, I have used writing as inquiry as I composed the two CAP pieces used to explore the differences and similarities between my experience and perspectives of camp directors. These narrative CAP presentations take the shape of a monologue delivered by a hypothetical camp director to parents interested in sending their child to her camp and narrative description of my experience one summer during which my cousin and I ran away from camp. As a whole, this study uses these two narratives to explore, describe and critique the issue of children's experiences at summer camp as well as elements of larger cultural beliefs as they are reflected in these two perspectives.

### **4.1 Autoethnography**

Located in the sixth moment in the history of qualitative research, autoethnography is an example of postexperimental inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), yet remains difficult to define as it is still an evolving genre of research. Applied to a broad range of studies, the methodological label "autoethnography" has been described as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Researchers using autoethnography use different techniques to

explore their own experiences in order to examine, describe or challenge an element of their own culture.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnographic research is linked to the postmodernist concept that the researcher is inextricable from his or her research, and that all research, no matter how “valid” or “reliable”, only represents one of many possible realities of human experience; despite all attempts to be objective, our perspective, our point of view as a researcher, will inevitably shape our findings. The social, personal and cultural meanings of an experience are shaped by the context, perspective and understanding of the individual participants. The same event can therefore be given many different meanings by different participants, all of which can be considered “right” or an approximation of “reality” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745). The “reality” of the author can therefore have a profound impact on his or her research findings as he or she attempts to attach meaning to his or her data.

Autoethnography locates the researcher directly in his or her research, addressing issues of representation and validity by acknowledging his or her subjectivity and individual experiences and using them to explore some facet of social or cultural experience.

The use of narrative approaches in much autoethnography furthers the movement away from postpositivist views by affirming that meaning and understanding are subjective entities formed after the experience as it is incorporated into the individual’s life story and world view (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). How these experiences are processed and the place they take in our life stories dictates the meaning they have for each of us. For instance, ‘the first day of school’ will take on very different meanings for a five-year-old starting kindergarten, a teacher starting his or her last school year before retirement or a teen returning to high school with established friendships. Using narrative approaches in research allows participants to share their experiences

in a more holistic manner by utilizing their personal stories, thereby including their own contexts and understandings, as the research material. As Bochner explains, (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) this type of narrative story “create[s] the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments...trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life’s unity...” (p. 744).

To study and understand the experiences of others, and often ourselves, we attempt to describe them and discern their meaning linguistically. The inherent subjectivity of this method, stemming from the subjective nature of linguistic communication, severely limits its ability to fully represent how one actually experienced a given event. Researchers have therefore begun to use narrative methodologies, not only to include personal contexts and perspectives, but also to attempt to address the gap between the actual lived experience and our linguistic representation and understanding of it (Holman Jones, 2005) by including the life stories of participants in their research.

The value of autoethnography is therefore based upon explicit incorporation of personal perspectives and narratives to achieve a more complete understanding of the cultural material being studied (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Individual memories and autobiographies, however, are limited by the perspective, perception and understanding of the individual. Cultural norms, events and values impact upon how we think about and, therefore, what we remember about personal experiences (Freeman, 2002). Freeman explains that cultural elements of an individual’s history and experience can limit our understanding of our selves and our memories. By placing these memories in their appropriate social and cultural contexts, Freeman asserts that we can “chart” our experiences and fully integrate these events in the overall story of our individual lives. As described in his paper, Freeman has applied this theory to one of his own

experiences to gain deeper understanding of his own reaction by exploring elements of cultural history linked to the experience. I have to used this method in my reflection section to examine my own experience and gain not only a deeper understanding of the experience itself, but, more importantly for this study, a deeper understanding of the complex cultural issues involved in those experiences.

## **4.2 Creative Analytic Practice:**

With our writing, we can choose to either simply create a physical manifestation of our knowledge or we can attempt to offer the reader a view into an experience, coupled with our understanding of that experience, for him or her to contemplate. This second type of writing requires more than scientific statements and facts; it needs to engage the reader and offer him or her the opportunity to experience, even if only vicariously, the issue or topic being explored in the research (Ellis, 2000). The interpretative nature of qualitative research requires a presentation style that complements its methodological purpose, reflects emotion and meaning, values the individuals' experiences and conveys the true essence of these experiences to the reader (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000).

As the meaning of this type of research is created between the participant, the researcher/writer and the reader, the job of the researcher is to present the material in a manner that fosters understanding of this meaning as he or she has come to understand it (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000). CAP presentations promote this sharing of meaning by moving beyond the structure of formal scientific writing to include creative presentation, rich descriptions and different view points (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Parry & Johnson, 2007). CAP has been used to convey: the ethnographic research of recreation professionals working with aboriginal youths

(Lashua & Fox, 2007); the process of evaluating narrative ethnographies (Ellis, 2000); the experience of conducting research on an extremely personal topic (Jago, 2006); the complexities of writing our research (Richardson, 1995); the transitions experienced as students with disabilities moved from the school to the community setting (Gillies, 2007); and a chapter in a qualitative research handbook (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Even as I am writing these simple textual descriptions, however, I feel I am misrepresenting these pieces as I am unable to convey the complexity of emotion and meaning I found in the original presentations.

As well as this ability to convey personal emotion and meaning, CAP can offer the reader the chance to “witness” the experience within the complex social and cultural contexts of the participants’ personal experiences (Parry & Johnson, 2007). I do not mean to suggest that the use of CAP eliminates all issues of representation; rather, it offers researchers the chance to present their conceptualization of the lived experience as they understand it was actually lived; the chance to recreate the experience for the reader, or, more accurately, their interpretation of it, rather than simply describing it. Thus, through the sharing of meaning and perspective, CAP also has the ability to foster empathy and a deeper understanding of the experiences of others (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This empathic sharing made it an ideal methodological match for the content of this study; what better way to discuss empathy and perspective than through actually placing the reader in the position of those I am suggesting need to be empathized with?

The self-reflexive nature of CAP means that assessment of its merit must include issues of “authority, authorship, truth, validity and reliability” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000, p. 964). As I am a twenty-eight-year-old researcher attempting to present the experience of an eleven-year-old and use it to make a definitive description of cultural norms and values, issues of authority and authorship are, obviously, prevalent in my research. I recognise that I cannot hope

to portray the experience of running away from camp as I actually experienced it as a child and that my “director’s dialogue” is simply my understanding of their perspective on the discourse surrounding summer camp. I also understand that, no matter how hesitantly or conditionally I phrase my experiences, I am claiming a position of authority with regard to children’s experiences (this irony, given the topic and dominant themes of this paper, does not elude me).

I will therefore reiterate here that I am not attempting to assert an absolute image of children’s experiences, or an unbiased assessment of the dominant discourse, merely that I am offering a counter narrative to invite the reader to think critically about our societal values and attitudes surrounding children’s leisure. I am not attempting to describe the “truth” about the way children are, or what the camp experience is “really like”; I am challenging readers to think critically about how we think and speak about children’s experiences at camp and how these issues relate to the larger cultural issues of children’s treatment in general and their experiences of leisure. Through the presentation of both CAP pieces, my study offers the reader two images of the same childhood experience with the intent of exploring the cultural structures underlying a dominant perspective on both an intellectual and emotional level.

Because of the creative and “experimental” methods of inquiry and presentation used in CAP, the use of traditional concrete methods of assessing research is not applicable (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000). To overcome this issue of evaluation, I offer Richardson’s criteria for evaluating ethnographic CAP, which focus on the effectiveness of the piece in question as both a creative presentation and a representation of research findings. To understand human experience, Richardson (2000) suggests that we examine it through both the lenses of science and creative arts by creating CAP that offers the reader a high degree of: (1) substantive contribution, (2) aesthetic merit, (3) reflexivity, (4) impact and (5) expression of reality. I chose these criteria in

particular because I feel that they are comprehensive and that they reflect the qualities I have hoped to embody in my work from the beginning of this study.

To me, these criteria simply take the values I had been taught to apply when evaluating all research and apply them in a manner appropriate to creatively presented material. To contain a *substantive contribution*, CAP must be grounded in its source material and constructed in a corresponding form. Like providing the original interview guide or describing the demographics of survey respondents, I feel this element ensures that the reader understands the broader entirety of the study and how it influences the presentation of the findings. I believe that most researchers would agree that all articles should meet Richardson's criteria of *aesthetic merit* by engaging readers in a complex and appealing manner and inviting their response. Every methods class I have ever taken has emphasized the need for researcher *reflexivity*, regardless of the methodology employed. Richardson's criterion outlines specific areas authors should reflect upon and acknowledge when employing CAP in a study which seem to centre primarily around the creative licence exercised by the author, the influence it gives him/her over the presentation of his/her findings and the potential lack of transparency for his/her methods. These issues include consideration of the ethical complexities of essentially rewording participants' perspectives, the subjective perspective of the author and the necessity for self-exposure and awareness, presumably especially important in this setting as these pieces are often presented on their own without a great deal additional text which might offer insight into the method and perspective of the researcher.

The fourth criterion, that of the research having an *impact* on the reader is something that I certainly feel is important and yet lacking in a great deal of traditional research papers. While most call for future research or make an attempt to link their work to a broader social

perspective, I would not say that I find them particularly inspiring or motivating. Richardson calls for authors of CAP to strive for their work to touch readers on both the emotional and intellectual level, thereby fulfilling her goal of approaching research with both the lens of art and that of science. Specifically, she suggests that CAP should impact readers by moving them to write, act or challenge how they conduct their own research (Richardson, 2000). Finally, Richardson addresses the success of the CAP as a representation of lived experience by evaluating it on the basis of its *expression of reality*. To me, this criterion speaks to both the facts used as the foundation of the creative expression and the manner in which it is expressed. To express a reality effectively, CAP pieces must present material that is “fleshed out” with sufficient detail and description in a manner which makes them “sound” credible or “true” to the reader (Richardson, 2000).

I felt that, as a whole, these criteria covered the perspectives of both science and art that Richardson often discusses in relation to CAP (Richardson, 1999; Richardson, 2000) and will ensure that any work evaluated within their framework succeed on both levels. This perspective, that our work can move beyond traditional, removed and somewhat sterilized presentations, was what drew me to this methodology in the first place; its ability to present research findings in a manner that speaks to both the mind and the heart.

When reflecting upon the issue of validity and the use of fiction in research, I found Richardson’s criteria countered most of my trepidations as well as the objections I heard raised in this area when I discussed my research with others. To me, by adhering to these criteria, an author can attempt to keep his/her work grounded in the source material and avoid “over-fictionalizing” his/her findings. Traditionally accepted qualitative methods, which rely heavily on including quotations to validate their findings, are still fraught with issues of representation



and the impact of the interpretation by researcher. While I admit that CAP offers the author more freedom with regard to how he/she presents those findings, I feel that the criteria described above will ensure that this work can be evaluated in much the same way any other research is evaluated: according to the current standards for a particular methodology. As long as criteria such as Richardson's are utilized effectively by authors as a framework for their work and by those evaluating the work, CAP pieces which stray too far from their source material or do not clearly share the links between that material and the final piece will be noted as poor research just as a quantitative study with questionable statistical analysis would be. Thus, I feel that research including fictionalized presentations can be considered valid as they can be evaluated and assessed just like any other research.

How I have personally used Richardson's criteria in my present work will be discussed at more length at the end of the methods section because I feel the reader needs to have a better understanding of my study before critiquing my application of this material.

### **4.3 Writing as Inquiry**

For this study, I have chosen to use my writing as a primary method of inquiry to explore these issues of children's leisure because it has allowed me to explore my own experiences through personal reflexive composition. With a topic such as the one profiled here, where there has been minimal preceding literature, this method of inquiry has allowed me, to use Richardson's (2000) phrase, to "crystallize" (p. 963) the issue and create a more substantial image of the various facets and topics involved in this complicated area. As mentioned in the introduction, this study stemmed from an internal conflict which I initially struggled to understand. I have used the writing as inquiry method to help me understand and explain this

conflict by “locating my particular biographical experiences in larger...sociological contexts” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000, p. 966). Thus, writing has composed a great deal of both my data collection and analysis process as I composed and reflected upon my experience, related the themes and issues that took shape to theory, and reflected upon what they reveal about both my perspective and the dominant discourse.

Specifically, this writing has taken the shape of two narratives and a reflexive discussion that explores the issues raised in the narratives when compared to one another. The process of writing both narratives included a great deal of reflection and looking back and forth between the text of the narrative and the material it was based upon. With my autoethnography, I periodically sat back from the writing and reflected on a given section, paragraph or episode to ensure that it matched my recollections regarding the experience. This process ended up with much writing, reading, re-writing, re-reading, recollecting, reflecting, and then more writing, all of which granted me deeper insight into my own experience and the broader cultural issues I saw reflected in the events of which it was comprised. Composing the second narrative followed much the same process. Using themes derived from qualitative interviews with camp directors, through the analysis process described below, I strove to create a monologue that reflected the collective image of camp presented in the interviews. Again, I continually moved between the composition and the source material, reflecting on how to best describe the various elements of the camp program and experience contained in the directors’ perspective. Overall, the experience of writing, deciding how to describe a specific facet of the camp experience, reflecting on which evocative or descriptive term to use, figuring out how the various themes fit together or how a specific event made me feel, brought me closer to my material and gave me a chance to explore

the issues involved in a much deeper manner than I had experienced in previous research experiences utilizing more traditional methods of analysis and presentation.

#### **4.4 Counter-narratives**

The value of counter narratives lies in their ability to offer an alternative to the dominant cultural stories. These dominant stories shape our understanding of our lives by offering us social contexts within which we can attempt to frame and explain our individual experiences. The use of counter narratives, compliments these dominant stories by offering us the chance to explore the experiences of those who feel that these dominant stories are incomplete or do not reflect their experiences through the telling of their stories. As outlined earlier in the section discussing CAP, the emotional content and expression in narrative can allow the reader a more personal connection with the subject matter as it is the method of expression closest to the actual experience (Richardson, 1990). Discussing the sociological impact of narrative research, Richardson (1990) notes,

At the individual level, people make sense of their lives through the stories that are available to them and they attempt to fit their lives into the available stories. People live by stories. If the available narrative is limiting, destructive or at odds with the actual life, peoples' lives end up being limited and textually disenfranchised (p. 129).

Narrative research, therefore, has great potential for social transformation as it encourages and facilitates the sharing of perspectives between different social groups. Counter narratives will either resonate with the reader's own experience, and thereby offer him or her a more appropriate sociocultural framework with which to explain his or her position, or oppose his or her

experiences, but still offer the reader the opportunity to understand that others do not experience the phenomenon as he or she does. In either case, these narratives can be a vital first step of communication between marginal and dominant groups, offering a greater sharing of perspective and empathetic understanding than traditional quantitative methods. These narratives can foster social transformation by first changing how we think about marginalized populations as they “can alter the shape and content of civic discourse by biographical, collectively, and politically enfranchising the previously disenfranchised” (Richardson, 1990, p. 132-133).

In this study, the story of my experience at camp offers a counter narrative as a description of an event from the perspective of an individual who is somewhat of an outsider of the dominant group. Through the exploration of my experience, the composition of the counter narrative and especially the comparison of it to the narrative based on the directors’ interviews, I have furthered my understanding of the issues involved in children’s experiences at camp. The further development and evolution of my perspective and understanding through the process of reflecting upon the narratives will be documented and included in the third, non-narrative, piece that will explore the relationship(s) between the narratives, their meaning or significance and the personal and cultural contexts I see them located within. In its entirety, therefore, my study will include a narrative representing a perspective of the dominant discourse, a counter narrative which challenges that perspective, and a reflexive discussion of the intricacies and relational dynamics of these perspectives in our culture.

#### **4.5 My perspective, my research process**

As discussed above, autoethnographic writing incorporates the subjectivity of the researcher by allowing him or her to explore his or her individual experiences and reflect on the

meaning he or she attaches to those experiences. Being raised and “unschooled” in a free, self-determined homeschool setting by a single mother, who herself has very unconventional ideas and beliefs, has offered me what I consider to be a very different perspective on the rights and capacities of children. As the entire purpose of my study was to use my personal experiences to write a counter narrative that challenged a dominant discourse surrounding children’s leisure, my somewhat unique subjective perspective has been a large part of my research; embracing my subjectivity and exploring what my perspective as an outsider reveals about a dominant viewpoint is essentially the purpose of this paper. Without this type of critique of both the presence and nature of a dominant discourse, it is impossible to evaluate its values and possible biases. My intention, therefore, was to explore my experience and through reflexive writing, using my perspective as an outsider, explore one of the dominant perspectives on children’s leisure.

In conducting this inquiry, I wrote two narrative pieces, described in greater detail below, relating to these issues of children’s leisure. The first piece is an autoethnography short story describing the events surrounding my cousin and I running away from residential camp entitled *What do you mean I can’t call home?* In contrast to this personal account, I also wrote a fictionalized presentation made by a camp director to the parents of potential campers, *More than just having fun in the woods, camp is...*, based on the perspective described in interviews conducted with camp directors. The final piece, *Questioning the currents: the reflections of a hippy kid struggling to find understanding in the mainstream*, is a reflexive exploration of the similarities and dissimilarities between the two narratives. This third piece of writing takes the place of traditional “findings” and “discussion” sections, and offers the reader my interpretation

of deeper cultural issues and structures found in the separate narratives when they were considered together, as two perspectives on the same cultural phenomenon.

#### **4.5.1 *What do you mean I can't call home?***

The first piece of my research, which contains the excerpt included in the introduction of this paper, was inspired by my experience of running away from camp when the staff would not let me and my cousin call home. This episode stands out personally as it is one of my first memories of finding myself in a position actively opposed to the mainstream ideology without my mother directly involved. Even though I knew my family was different, I was shocked and dismayed to find out the depths of that difference with regard to children's rights, voice and autonomy. While some elements of the memory have been blurred by the decade and half that has come between that night and today, some elements, including the emotions I felt, remain crystal clear and will be the basis of this story. Unreliable memories can present problems in research that is attempting to assert an absolute "truth" about a phenomenon. In this study, however, I am not claiming to be presenting historical accuracy; this is "a story about the past and not the past itself" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I am simply hoping to relate my memories of a childhood experience that reflect a great deal in regard to cultural values, norms and beliefs. With this purpose in mind, I have chosen not to confirm any details or facts with others involved in the episode as this would compromise the integrity of this piece as a representation of my personal experience.

This piece was composed through a process of documenting the facts and emotions I recalled and then placing them in a narrative representation with the hopes of offering the reader a rich description of the experience as I remember it. Some small details such as specific physical descriptions and actual verbatim conversations may not be factually correct but this type

of fictionalized material was only included if necessary to convey my recollected emotions. Again, as my emphasis in this piece rests on how I felt and experienced the episode at camp as a whole, I feel that this minimal fictionalization of minor details is acceptable and appropriate as it has facilitated the communication of broader experience.

To put it simply, I wrote down everything I remembered about the episode, reflected upon that list of facts and then composed a short story based upon these recollections. The experience of this process, however, was much more complicated. When writing more complex passages or grappling with deeper emotions, I found that I had to be disciplined about going back and rereading sections over again and fleshing out the descriptions if I had breezed over an important thought or element. With the more emotional sections and elements, I found I had to be especially careful not to let myself pull back. Many times, after rereading a section I had to force myself to rewrite it and be more descriptive and honest about my recalled emotions because the first draft was too superficial.

I knew that writing this autoethnography would be challenging, that I would be dredging up old emotions and having to relive a rather unpleasant memory. I had read cautions about the emotional toll of reliving personal experiences and preparing them for public viewing over and over again as I prepared the first few chapters of this paper and I thought I was prepared for the experience as a whole, but I was wrong. While I wouldn't call the experience torturous or unduly upsetting, the level of emotionality brought on by my writing and the different types of emotions I experienced resulted in a much more intense experience than I was anticipating. I had expected to be sad, to perhaps relive some of the anger I felt towards the camp staff, but I did not expect to be brought to tears as I wrote the narrative. Even now, months after finishing the narrative, as I reread it before including it in this paper, I found myself becoming agitated and eventually

choking up again as I read it. During the writing process, I found that I often had to step back and take a break from writing, after describing a particularly upsetting incident, in order to let my emotions settle so that I could continue writing.

I also found that the overall process was more draining than I had expected. When writing other papers, I usually start by just thinking about the project and let it simmer at the back of my mind for a while without doing any actual writing. Eventually, after I've established some kind of grip on what I want to say, I leap in head first, sitting and writing for as long as I possibly can and minimize the interruptions and distractions I experience between bouts of writing to maintain my focus and the flow of my thoughts. Generally, this approach means I spend hours writing at once with only short breaks thrown in when I feel my attention waning. With this piece, however, I found that I could not write for nearly as long at single a stretch before I found my writing being compromised and the short breaks I usually use to refresh my mind and refocus myself were simply not enough. The emotional weight of what I was reliving meant that I could only work in short spurts and needed to take longer, more involved breaks in between. Once I realized that this was what was happening, and I was able to change my approach, the writing went a lot smoother. It was still emotionally draining, but I was no longer wasting time trying to make myself stay focused or increasing my stress levels by struggling to work when it was just not possible.

While I was upset by describing my homesickness, it was the deeper personal revelations regarding my shame and embarrassment that I found the most upsetting. Even though I know it was not a pleasant experience, whenever I've talked about running away from camp, prior to this study, I've always spoken of it with pride and have generally portrayed it as a fun adventure. I am still proud of what my cousin and I did, but I am now more aware of the deeper complexities



that were involved in the episode and I don't think I would have reached this level of understanding if I had not forced myself to relive it and explore my memories in such detail.

During the writing process, I was entirely caught up in the experience and the management of my emotions so that I could finish the piece and meet the standard for both quality of writing and level of emotionality I had set myself at the outset. Once it was completed, however, I suddenly realized that by choosing this topic area and methodology for my thesis, I had also chosen to share what had become a very personal and very private introspection. Initially, this thought terrified me. In my narrative, I openly discussed areas of myself and my life about which I am normally very guarded. They are not exactly what I would call secrets, but I am usually very selective about where, when, with whom and to what extent I share them with others. This time, though, I had purposefully explored these areas of vulnerability and laid them wide open for criticism, critique and judgement before an undetermined number of strangers as well as a group of people I deeply admire and respect.

While I was writing I had a few thoughts about sharing the narrative and was intentionally vague about elements of my past which I was not willing to share and did not have direct bearing on the autoethnography. But upon its completion, the reality of what I had written and who I would be sharing it with, both through this paper and two conference presentations I was to be giving, was somewhat startling. Reflecting on my reaction, however, I realized that while I was not entirely comfortable with the sharing of my work, I was also not willing to abandon this study or compromise it by unduly editing the autoethnography. Following on this thinking, after the initial emotional reaction faded, I found that I felt surprisingly freed by the realization that I was simply going to offer up this incredibly personal story for others to read,

judge and critique and was actually glad that I did not have an “easy way out” that would allow me to avoid doing so.

#### ***4.5.2 More than just having fun in the woods, camp is...***

The second CAP piece is a hypothetical presentation made by a camp director to parents considering sending their child to her camp. Representing a dominant adult perspective of the summer camp experience, this piece was based upon the responses of the camp directors interviewed as part of the nation-wide study. After some consideration about how best to represent my analysis of these interviews, I chose the form of the monologue presentation as it would allow the director to “talk” about both specific programming elements as well the more emotional facets of the camp experience as it was described in the interviews. I also chose this representation because several directors mentioned this type of presentation in their interviews and I understand it to be a standard marketing practice utilized by camps. Using my interpretation of the themes, concepts and issues identified by the camp directors as essential components of the camp program that contribute to the outcomes and experiences campers experience, I constructed the narrative to reflect what a camp director might say when trying to “sell” his or her camp to parents. The purpose of this piece, therefore, is to contrast the description of my experience at camp and describe how adults with long term involvement with camp see it.

The camp director interviews used in this piece were initially collected at the Ontario Camping Association annual conference in February of 2007 as part of a nation-wide study examining the camp experience. I utilized purposeful sampling to select a group of six interviews that I was present for that included directors with extensive experience in traditional residential

camp settings. As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, I chose not to include day or specialty camps as their purpose, mission and programming can be quite varied, thereby altering the camp experience and expectations of adults involved. The directors whose interviews were used are all white, middle aged individuals with extensive personal experience as camp staff and, for the most part, as campers. My reaction as I analyzed some of these interviews for a course in the spring of 2007 was one of the catalytic elements of this research, as I already mentioned. This reaction to the statements of the directors spurred me to undertake this study in an effort to explore and understand the issues surrounding children's leisure and summer camp.

The purpose of these interviews in the larger camp study was to explore what camp directors see as the outcomes campers experience in relation to their participation in a camp program. The informal interview guide (Appendix A) was used as a rough guide for the interviews, but each one was opened with asking the director(s) involved to tell us a story that they think typifies the camp experience. Following from this opening, many directors spent a great deal of time discussing how they see the camp experience playing out for their campers as they described the benefits they saw their program offering; after labelling an outcome, the directors almost always described the element of the camp experience which was responsible for that outcome by way of expanding on their label or furthering the discussion about how children come to receive that particular outcome. What resulted from each interview was a distinct description of what the directors saw as the pivotal elements of their program and how those elements impacted upon their campers.

The overwhelmingly positive descriptions could be challenged by the suggestion that we were asking service providers about the outcomes of their programs. Nevertheless, upon reviewing the interview guide, I felt that there was ample room within the questions we used for

the directors to bring up any negative outcomes their campers may experience. Wanting to confirm my feelings about this issue, I brought it to the attention of my supervisor, Dr. Glover, who wrote the interview guide and conducted half of the interviews I selected. He agreed with my perspective on the interviews, that the questions had been framed in a neutral manner, but that the responses were decidedly focused on positive outcomes. To me, the limited nature of these descriptions reflects directors' perspectives on camp which is discussed further in the reflections portion of this paper.

As my purpose with this part of the study was to determine the overall description of the experience of camp in the directors' interviews, I have chosen to use phenomenological methods to analyze the interviews. As noted by van Manen (1997), description of lived experiences can take many forms including: transcriptions of interviews, diaries, conversations and even "accounts of vicarious experiences [in the form] of drama, film, poetry or novels" (p. 92). To document the description of the camp phenomenon as reflected in these interviews, I will use a van Manen's series of analytical stages. To isolate thematic essences in a description of a lived experience, van Manen outlines three stages of analysis. A "wholistic or sentientious" approach, addressing the themes revealed when examining the article as a whole, a "selective or highlighting" approach that summarizes the themes found in particularly revealing statements, and finally, a "detailed" approach which examines every sentence or cluster of sentences (p. 92-93).

To explore the themes and common essences of the interviews, I analyzed them using these stages, completing all three stages with each interview before moving on to the next. The first stage, wholistic analysis, required an overall analysis of the basic themes of the interview as a whole. To conduct this stage of the analysis, I began with a close reading of the transcript, only

taking notes at the end, and attempted to capture the entire experience in one or two phrases. After I had finished that basic description, I reread the transcript and highlighted what appeared to be the key expressions of the phenomena of camp and attached a descriptive label to each expression. During the final reading, I attached small phrases or labels to each sentence, or small cluster of sentences, which again described its essence. After finishing this process for all three interviews, I then reread each transcript to ensure I did not overlook any important comments or ideas. Each interview's essences were then typed into my computer where I used colour coding on each list to differentiate between the interviews

After I reread these lists of essences to ensure accuracy with the original interview and context of the original phrases, I printed them out, cut out each phrase and physically sorted them into clusters. I then read through each cluster's expressions, eliminating those which were repeated and reducing each cluster down to its essential structures. These initial structures were then analyzed for the overall structures they represented and labelled accordingly. These structures were then analyzed and grouped, according to general similarities and common properties, into broader themes which created my final interpretation of the phenomenon.

After I conducted this analysis, I examined the groups of themes and composed the CAP monologue representing the overall image of the camp experience expressed by the directors using examples of programs from real camps that were either taken directly from the directors' interviews or my personal experience. Essentially, I reflected on the themes I had found in the interviews collectively and chose specific facets of the camp experience which embodied each theme and then constructed the narrative around these facets that would flow together naturally and give the reader a richer understanding of these elements of the phenomenon. Similar to Johnson's (2005) use of the narrative stream in order to present a collective image of a country

western bar based on the different perspectives of several research participants, I used the narrative format to create a holistic image of the camp experience based on the descriptions of the group of directors as a whole.

## 4.6 Evaluation

As I mentioned above, I have utilized Laurel Richardson's (2000) criteria for evaluating CAP throughout my research as a framework for my composition process. Reflecting on her criteria, I felt that these were valuable categories for evaluation of my work and at the same time initially struggled with how to use them to improve it. My first reaction was that much of what Richardson described in the criteria was highly subjective and would therefore depend on the individual interpretation of the reader. So how was I supposed to write something that would meet these criteria for every reader? As I worked on the paper and the narratives, I felt even more confused because my work, as a whole, was not just made up of creative analytic practice, but also included more traditional research presentation sections such as the one on methods which you are currently reading. Eventually, I found my way through these issues and was able to apply these criteria to my work.

The first of these criteria, that of *substantive contribution* asks how the pieces has contributed to our collective understanding of the social-life. I have to admit that I struggled with understanding this element of Richardson's overall criteria at first. To me, it seemed that the writer's perspective will obviously inform the construction of the piece and did not know how I would go about demonstrating the degree to which my work was grounded in my human-world understanding. Reading other authors' interpretation of Richardson's work (Parry & Johnson, 2007), however, I came to understand this criteria meant that for CAP pieces to be considered

successful, merely containing new knowledge or understanding in regard to a substantive area of research was not enough, that the piece itself had to contribute to this understanding. I realized that I had missed an important part of the CAP process; it isn't merely a different way of telling people about what I found in my research, it needs to actually embody those findings in its construction.

The autoethnography describing my experience from my perspective superficially fulfilled this criterion because it allowed me to describe how I felt and what I thought as well as the specific events that shaped the experience. With regard to the more complex human element of my choice in constructing this CAP, however, the narrative short story is also a good match for this material. I have always enjoyed narrative fiction and have experienced a deep sense of connection to both the characters and the writers of my favourite stories. These stories have been an ever-present element of my life experience, offering me comfort and escape, teaching me lessons, challenging me, and encouraging me to reflect on the world around me. In fact, one of the pivotal moments in my academic career centred around the realization that my most profound moments of understanding were directly linked to reading narrative poetry or prose. To me, the knowledge that my understanding was fundamentally altered by the experiences or perspectives of individual authors somehow unlocked the resistance I had felt to qualitative work based upon its lack of large "statistically significant" sample sizes and allowed me to drastically alter how I thought about research, knowledge and social understanding in general. Based on these observations, the use of a narrative story to represent my experience fulfils this area of criteria.

In choosing the form of the second CAP piece which was to be based on interviews with the camp directors, I decided to use a traditional method of camp marketing which allows the directors to speak directly to prospective campers' parents about the camp experience: the camp

“information session” presentation. These types of presentations are common and are often held in community centres, schools or libraries located within communities that might contain families interested in specific camp programs. By choosing this form for the construction of this CAP piece, I have been able to convey the findings of my analysis of the interviews in a traditional form which is similar to how directors often choose to speak about their understanding of the camp experience.

The second criteria, that of *aesthetic merit* seemed more straightforward and yet gave me more difficulty in terms of my construction of the pieces. I want all my writing, CAP or not, to meet this criteria, but again, its subjectivity makes it rather difficult to ensure that it is met successfully in the eyes of a reader. In constructing my autoethnography, I strove to include descriptive explanation of both the physical setting and events as well as my internal state throughout the experience in order to try and present the reader with a satisfying and interesting read. I also believe that the discussion of my internal state, my struggle with my emotions and my confusion over the behaviour of the staff increase the complexity of the piece while also building tension and a sense of conflict in the piece which I hope will keep it from being boring. For the director’s narrative, I included “anecdotes” describing specific camp experiences and emphasized the director’s passion for her program and the impact it has on her campers for the same reasons. While this subject matter is perhaps less dramatic and enthralling than that of the autoethnography, I feel that the description of camp mingled with the “personal” stories varies the narrative content and focus enough to retain the reader’s interest.

The criteria of *reflexivity*, outlining the need for self-awareness on the part of the author to recognise and acknowledge her own subjectivity was relatively straightforward, due to the structure of my study as a whole. With regard to the second CAP piece, the director’s narrative, I



have already included a description of my analysis process this paper as well as a summary of my findings in Appendix B so that the reader may assess my representation of the findings as he or she would with a more traditional method of representation of data.

I have also described my composition process for both narratives earlier in this methods section which I hope will give the reader a clear understanding of how I created the CAP pieces based on the source material I am using. To ensure that the camp directors were aware of my work and my proposed method of representing their perspectives, and how it might differ from what they were anticipating with the original study, I contacted those directors who met my selection criteria (which will be described later) and received permission for the inclusion of their interviews in my narrative. With regard to the ethical considerations of my autoethnography, I have changed every name in it except my own, did not identify the camp in any way and informally received the support of my family members involved as formal consent is not required for autoethnography. To me, this piece is simply my story of what happened at camp and I make no claims that it is an absolute representation of those events or in any way presents the perspectives of any other persons involved. I will however, reflect upon my perspective on the behaviour of others and what their actions, as I remember them, have to tell us about the cultural and social structures involved in my experience at camp.

The fourth criterion, the *impact* of the CAP, is again complicated by the entirety of this paper. In the final sections, I will be reflecting on my CAP pieces and explicitly outlining the elements I feel warrant further academic exploration, thereby following Richardson's suggestion that research involving CAP generate questions. As for her emphasis on intellectual stimulation, it is in the comparison of the two pieces that I feel readers will be challenged. They represent two potential perspectives on a single phenomenon in our society and, when explored as a whole,

they offer the reader many conflicting descriptions of similar elements of the camp program. In my reflections section I will discuss the areas of conflict which I found especially poignant but I hope that readers will reflect upon the two narratives on their own to determine how they see the two visions of camp coming together while also maintaining very different images of the camp experience.

I hope that these contrasting images also speak to my readers on an emotional level. I purposefully included detailed descriptions and internal discussion of my emotions and thoughts in the autoethnography to try and share with my readers just how I remember it felt to be at camp in my situation. In the director's narrative, however, I stayed true to the directors' interviews and focused more on the positive experiences and outcomes of the camp experience. It is my hope that by reflecting on the emotional impact of these types of experiences, adult readers may reflect on their own experiences, both as children and as adults interacting with children and be challenged to reflect upon the balance of power and the issue of voice both in their research and their own lives.

The final criterion in Richardson's list is *expression of reality*. For my first CAP piece, I made the decision not to try and compose a narrative as if it were written by an eleven year old. My reason for this decision was two fold. The first being that I felt it would be very difficult to maintain this feature perfectly throughout the text and felt that trying and failing, even slightly, would seriously influence the overall flow of the piece, its impact, its "reality" and quality of the work as a whole. Secondly, I am not eleven years old. While I described my memories of the events at camp as truthfully as I could, and did not specifically include observations or dialogue from my "adult self", this is still a story of my memories of an event and I am not claiming it to be the words of a child. I feel that my perspective and unique experience at camp offer a specific

insight into the camping phenomenon, especially when contrasted with the directors' perspective and have therefore chosen to construct my autoethnography as a memory-based story to give the reader access not only to what happened at that camp but also how it felt and what it was like, as I remember it.

When composing the narrative based on the directors' interviews, I used actual terms or examples from the interviews as often as possible, in order to make "her" description of camp as accurately as possible. Because the interviews with the directors contained so many examples, each director almost always linked each and every outcome they discussed with a specific example from his or her program, I was able to create a narrative which I feel accurately reflects their collective image of camp as an experience. Based on my own experience with dramatic monologues, as both a performer and audience member, and my observations about the mechanics of how the directors spoke about camp, I allowed the director in my narrative to "ramble" at times, circulating from a specific point into examples and perhaps a personal story before returning to the original point and then moving on. In this manner, I have attempted to present a narrative that "reads" as if it were an informal presentation being made by an experienced professional who has given a similar presentation many times before and yet is still passionate about her subject matter.

Dealing with the subjectivity of these criteria as a fledgling academic with little research experience to speak of, I sought external opinions on my writing by asking two people to read the CAP pieces and give me feedback on their effectiveness. I purposefully chose two readers with different levels of involvement with this study and my material in order to access different perspectives. The first reader, a friend not involved in my research, was able to speak to the narrative construction, the effectiveness of the descriptions and the overall literary merit and

impact of the pieces in and of themselves. The second reader, my supervisor Dr. Glover, offered feedback not only on the narratives in and of themselves but also on my success with the second CAP piece as he is extremely familiar with the director's interviews and my overall study.

Overall, throughout my composition process, by reflecting on these criteria and reminding myself of them as I worked, I kept myself grounded in the ethnographic material I was presenting and used them to keep myself from drifting too far into the fictional side of the composition process. Several times as I wrote, I had to remind myself of the source material and draw back from including elements which did not represent that material, no matter how well they seemed to match the flow of the narrative.

With that being said, I will now leave my readers to explore my narratives before bringing my academic voice back to reflect upon the work as a whole.

## **5.0 Two sides to every story (*Findings*)**

### **5.1 *What do you mean I can't call home?***

The van made its way down surprisingly smooth country roads, following one of the four copies of the map that had arrived at our house in four different pre-camp packages. After the last few days of hectic shopping trips, sorting of laundry and rechecking the “what to bring to camp” lists, I felt strange just sitting quietly in the van just waiting to arrive at camp. Sitting and watching the farmers’ fields pass by outside the window, I felt a confusing mixture of emotions. For two years, I had heard stories about cabin-mates, canoe trips, campfires and all the other activities that sounded so cool when the older kids talked about them. I couldn’t wait to experience camp for myself, but I was also nervous about meeting new people and being away from home for two whole weeks.

Over the winter, I had had several talks with my mom about ‘sleepaway’ camp and in the early spring, I told her that I was ready and wanted to go this summer. The decision had been relatively easy back then, with the safe buffer of several months between me and the actual event. As we approached the camp road now, however, I was tense and anxious. I didn’t tell my mom though, somehow it didn’t occur to me to bring it up. I kind of just thought that it was a normal part of your first camp experience and that I would have fun once I got there.

Beneath all the nerves, the excitement and the anticipation, I also felt a gentle sadness. I knew that going away “for real” for the first time would change things. At eleven, I didn’t know exactly how or what it would change, but I felt certain things would not be the same when I got home.

As my mom turned the van off the main road, I caught sight of a wooden sign marking the camp road. My heart caught in my chest. The drive down the potholed dirt road that ran between two corn fields only took a few minutes, but, to me, it felt like an eternity. At last we reached a large open

parking lot full of kids, parents, duffle bags and counsellors in camp t-shirts. After my siblings and cousins and I piled out of the van, my mom and aunt arranged our individual piles of gear and asked a counsellor to which cabins we'd all been assigned. Leaving the older two to carry their bags to their own cabins with help from camp staff, my mom and my aunt helped my cousin Joe and I get our gear to our respective cabins.

After dragging my bags up the hill to the cluster of girls' cabins, we found my cabin and I followed my mom inside.

"Hi! My name's Jen!" a teenage girl with short brown hair greeted us as we walked inside.

"Hi Jen," my mom said, "this is Amy and I think she's in your cabin."

Jen nodded and checked a piece of paper she held, "Morton or Cha..."

"Chapeskie," my mom said, smiling at her struggle with our last name.

"Yup, she's here. Uhm, that bunk is still free," she said, pointing at a bottom bunk near the door. "I'll be outside if anyone needs anything," with that, Jen skipped outside to join some other counsellors who were sitting at a picnic table talking.

The handful of other girls who were already there and unpacked offered their names and I introduced myself in response but didn't really pay attention to what they said, distracted by the fact that my mom would soon be leaving.

"Well, let's get your stuff unpacked before Carrie and I have to go, honey," my mom said.

The thought of them leaving twisted my stomach into a knot. I could feel tears beginning to well up in my eyes.

Looking away and fussing with my sleeping bag I managed to say, "No, that's ok. I'll do it on my own." I struggled to keep her from hearing the sadness in my voice.

"Oh, ok. Well, I guess we'll just say good-bye and leave you to get settled then," my mom said, smiling at me. "I hope you have a great time, sweetie."

She gave me a hug. I didn't want to let go, but I did. I blinked away the tears, buckling down my emotions. I was eleven years old. I wasn't some baby who couldn't be away from home for a mere two weeks. Bobby and Shannon had gone to camp at my age and had had a great time.

"You guys have fun at home," I said to my sister, Carrie.

"Ok, see ya!"

I turned back to my bunk to avoid watching them actually leave. I was embarrassed to be so upset when all my bunkmates appeared to be happy and excited about camp. I didn't want to be the weird home-schooled kid who couldn't handle a normal kid thing like camp. For years I had known that my family was different: we didn't go to school, we'd had family beds, we drank soy milk and went to a naturopath (most of the kids I met who were my age didn't even know what that was) and we had all sorts of different people living with us at different times. I knew a few other families who were similar to ours and certainly wasn't ashamed of my family life but interactions with 'normal' kids my age, kids who went to school, who lived with just their parent or parents and siblings, had taught me that we weren't just different, we were *weird*. I didn't think that these other kids thought all families were exactly the same, they just made it clear to me that my family was really different. In most of these interactions it appeared clear to me that, generally, our kind of different wasn't something these other kids seemed to think was a good thing. By eleven, I'd been teased and judged often enough to know that if I wanted to get along with 'normal' kids, it was best if I just did my best to fit in and kept my family life to myself as much as possible. At camp, I wanted to stick it out because, after years of family counsellors and lawyers debating the impact of my mom's choices, I wanted to prove I was a normal kid, that I was ok.

After all the parents left, Jen returned to our cabin for another can of pop, a tub of instant icing, which she ate straight out of the carton, and to post something on the wall of her bunk. She turned back to face us and said,

“Anyone who looks in my bunk is going to be in BIG trouble,” before going back outside.

A couple of my cabin mates snuck over to look in Jen’s bunk after she left. Hearing their exclamations, the rest of us looked too and saw a calendar bearing a photograph of a seemingly naked man posing behind a strategically placed palm leaf. The other girls talked about how gross it was and quickly returned to their bunks. I was confused by both their disgust and Jen’s threats. In my house, nudity was not something remarkable or shameful. While I knew this reaction to nudity wasn’t consistent with every family, I didn’t understand why other kids would actually think it was gross.

Jen’s threats had also upset me. I couldn’t understand why she would post something like that and then threaten us so we wouldn’t look at it. Coming from a family that based discipline and expectations on logic and empathy, I didn’t know what to make of her threats and assumed we really would “get in trouble”, whatever that meant, if she caught us looking at the picture.

I busied myself unpacking my bags and organizing my things in my cubbyhole while other campers arrived with their parents and went through the same routine.

After everyone had arrived, Jen came back into the cabin and clapped her hands to get our attention.

“Ok, ladies, put on your suits. I’m going to take you on a quick tour of the camp and then down to the water front for your swim tests.”

She led us around the camp grounds, pointing out various places and filling us in on some basic rules and expectations as we went.

“There’s the girls’ showers, you can shower first thing in the morning or during freetime but not during activity times... Those are the boys’ cabins up there. You can go up the hill but girls aren’t allowed in boys’ cabins or even on the porches, and boys aren’t allowed in ours either... That’s the dining hall there. When the bell rings for a meal we all meet on that tarmac and line up as a cabin group. We can’t go in until everyone’s here so don’t



dawdle when you hear the bell. If you hear the bell at any other time and it keeps ringing it means there's an emergency and you have to get here to the tarmac to line up as fast as you can so we can do a headcount and make sure everyone is ok..."

Eventually she led us down to the waterfront area. Once we got there, Jen warned us that being caught anywhere near the waterfront without a staff member would result in "trouble".

"For the swim test you have to swim three laps between the dock and the buoy-line without touching the bottom or the dock," she explained. "If you fail the test, you can't go on the canoe trip with us and you have to stay behind in one of the little kids' cabins," this last part she said with a scowl on her face and a tone of voice that to me meant it wasn't just a matter of safety and making accommodations; having to stay with a younger cabin was apparently something very shameful. I didn't know what we'd have to do in the test. I thought I was a pretty good swimmer, but after her threat, I was really worried I'd fail. Throughout the tour and swim test, she seemed distracted and bored. I was hurt by her lack of interest in our cabin group. I had assumed, as our counsellor, she would have been excited to meet the group and get to know us.

After the swim test, we had free time. While Jen talked outside with her counsellor friends, some of the other girls sat on their bunks and chatted about their respective homes. I felt so lonely and awkward. I didn't know how to join their conversation, so I sat on my bunk pretending to read, trying desperately to keep myself from crying. After consuming more pop and icing outside, Jen eventually came into the cabin, turned on her stereo and joined the girls who were chatting.

"You go to Overbrook?" she asked one camper who nodded in reply. "My boyfriend went there. We've been together since grade ten. I always miss him so-o-o much at camp. He's working at camp at his dad's store this summer..." she continued to dominate the conversation, talking incessantly

about her boyfriend, essentially delivering a monologue about how much she missed him and how great he was until the dinner bell rang.

Jen herded us down to the field in the centre of camp and told us to line up. We filed into the dining hall and followed Jen to our cabin's table. I sat quietly during the meal, trying to swallow past the lump in my throat.

About fifteen minutes after the meal was served, the group of girls at the table behind us stood up on their benches and sang a song about the Titanic sinking. After that, a nearby table of boys got up and yelled a chant at their neighbours claiming that there 'ain't no flies' on them but that there might be 'flies on some of you guys'. Other groups followed suit and when a table began a song, others often jumped up to join in.

Some of the girls in my cabin joined in with some of the songs, but I didn't know any of the words so I just sat there silently. It felt strange to feel so lonely sitting in such a large group of people. They were all part of something to which I didn't belong. The group at the table next to us sang a song about how "I can't smile without you" and it made me think of my family at home. Once again the tears welled up in my eyes, so I kept my head down, toying with my food, embarrassed that someone my age should feel homesick after just a few hours away from home. The evening program flew by in a blur as I struggled to maintain my composure.

That night, after watching us brush our teeth, Jen stood at the cabin door as we climbed into our sleeping bags.

"Ok, lights out!" she said, "I have the night off, so I'm heading out, but you all have to stay here in your bunks. Night patrol will be checking around to make sure no one sneaks out." With that, she switched off the light and left us alone. Some of the girls chatted for a little while before quieting down and falling asleep. I lay silently in my bunk, trying to keep my tears to myself as I listened to the trees rustling gently outside the cabin. It felt like it took me hours to fall asleep. I woke up when Jen returned to the cabin. She crept in quietly, slipping into her bunk without turning on a light. I lay awake again, missing home and feeling very, very alone in the dark night.

The next morning, I woke groggy and unsure of where I was. A loud bell was ringing, and as I looked around me, my heart sank.

“Hurry up girls, if you want to go to morning dip head down to the lake. I’m gonna sleep until breakfast,” Jen called sleepily from her bunk.

Not ready to face the day, I nestled down into my sleeping bag as I turned to the wall. I drifted in and out of sleep until the bell rang again and I heard Jen climbing out of her bunk.

“All right lazies, let’s get a move on to breakfast!”

I slowly climbed out of my bunk and got dressed. My stomach churned at the thought of breakfast. Usually I could take comfort in food, but that morning it felt as if all the loneliness, homesickness and shame had crawled into my stomach and formed a heavy, heaving mass there. I followed my cabin mates down to the field where we lined up and stood quietly as they ran the flag up the flagpole. Shuffling into the dining room in a crowd of campers, I looked around for my brother or either of my cousins. For a moment, I thought I saw one of the boys and my heart lifted briefly. The crowd shifted, though, and I lost sight of him. Sitting crammed on a bench between two other girls, I played with my cereal and slowly sipped the sweet artificial juice.

After a quick clean up of the cabin, Jen told us it was time for cabin activities.

“I signed us up to go swamp-tromping!” she said excitedly. “So put on your extra pair of shoes or rubber boots and clothes that can get really, really dirty.”

We all changed and followed her out of the cabin, without knowing what we were about to do. Jen led us to a dirt path behind the med-shack that wound its way off into the woods. After a few minutes of walking, we stopped in a small clearing. Just inside the clearing, the path opened up into a large muddy area. Jen smiled at us and walked into the mud, which was much deeper than it looked. Her feet disappeared into the mud as she made her way

into the centre of the clearing. Standing looking at us, she smiled again before falling straight back into the mud.

“C’mon in girls, the mud’s fine!”

We looked at each other curiously before making our way out to where she was making a mud angel. When we got close, she sprang up to her knees and began hurling mud at us. Within seconds, the peace of the quiet wood was shattered with excited shrieks and cries as we flung mud back and forth and wrestled as we tried to knock each other down into the wet mess. I romped with the others: belly-flopping into the mud, piling it up on another girl’s head or throwing a big chunk at Jen, ignoring the odd scratch from a buried stick or tree root and totally oblivious to the many mosquitoes that hovered over our heads. I was having fun for the first time since I arrived at camp. A little of the weight in my chest had lifted.

Giggling with a cabin mate whose name I couldn’t remember, I snuck up behind Jen. Screaming as loud as we could, we gave her a good push, knocking her face-first into the mud. She shrieked and twisted in the mud as the other girls flung fistfuls of mud down on her.

“Ok, Ok, I give up!” she called at last, laughing. “It’s time we headed back to camp to get cleaned up anyway.”

Grumbling and flinging the last of our mud at each other, we followed Jen back down the path, enjoying the pleasantly squishy feeling of the mud between our toes. Back at camp, Jen dragged a hose out from the shed behind the med-shack and proceeded to blast us with freezing water. We resumed our shrieking as we ran around trying to avoid the spray until she was satisfied we were clean enough to head back to the cabin.

“Ok girls, we have just enough time to shower before lunch, but we’ll have to hurry, so move your butts!”

We grabbed our shower stuff and headed to the small building that housed the girl’s showers.

All cleaned up, with our hair still wet, we raced down to line up for lunch. Standing at our benches we sang “grace”. As I finally heard the

opening lines to a song I knew, I was excited to be able to join in, but the familiarity of the Cat Stevens song, “Morning has Broken”, brought fresh tears to my eyes. The full weight of my homesickness came crashing back. I could hear my mom’s voice in my ear singing along as I struggled to finish the song and hide my face at the same time. I was so disappointed with myself. I had just had fun that very morning, hadn’t I? Why was I being such a baby? Why couldn’t I just have fun like the other girls? The song ended and we all sat down. Once again, the ball of homesickness and shame slammed back into my gut and I couldn’t eat any more than a couple of bites. The dining hall rang with laughter and song as different cabin groups stood up to sing or chant a taunt at another group. I kept my head down throughout the rest of lunch, avoiding looking at anyone to make sure they couldn’t see any evidence of my emotions.

After lunch, we went swimming and played around in the waterfront area. I enjoyed myself a little, but still hadn’t made any real connections with any of my cabin mates or the staff. Even when I was having fun, the weight of my homesickness felt heavy in my stomach. I was enjoying myself, but the littlest thing that reminded me of home or my family would push me right back to the verge of tears.

After swimming, we got to sign up for our own activities. There were lots of options from which to choose and I ended up going to something called “jabberwocky”, which I had been told was “kinda like” drama, something I’d always enjoyed, but hadn’t had the chance to do a lot of. To my pleasant surprise, my older cousin Shannon was sitting with the group when I arrived. She waved hello to me and went back to chatting with another girl sitting next to her.

The head counsellor, Connor, opened the session by teaching us the game ‘dead legs’

“Ok, guys, find a partner and decide who’s going to go first,” he said.

I ended up partnering with a girl standing next to me and we decided I would participate first.

“Ready? Ok, who ever is going first has to lie down on their back.”

We followed his instructions.

“Now, their partner holds their legs up in the air so that they are bent at the hip but straight through the knee. Can I borrow your legs for a second?” he asked one of the boys lying on the ground. The boy nodded.

“Lift your feet right up,” Connor waved his hands upwards with his palm facing up. The boy lifted his feet until they were a foot or so off the ground.

“Right, so you want to grab their feet and hold them so that they’re right over their hips, but keeping their legs straight.” Connor demonstrated by raising the boy’s feet until his legs were at a right angle to his torso. “Now, you need to hold them here until I say stop.” Connor leant the boy’s feet against his own stomach but kept his hands on his feet to keep his legs straight. “Ok? Go ahead,” he said, waving to the boy’s partner and letting him step in and replace him holding the feet.

I lifted my legs and my partner grasped them and held them against her stomach just as Connor had done.

“Right, ok. So we’re going to hold their legs here for a minute or so. Everyone on the ground try to relax and everyone holding their legs, try to hold as still as you can.”

I lay on the ground, watching the clouds drifting lazily across the blue sky. After a while Connor spoke again,

“So, no one move yet. I want everyone on the ground to close their eyes.” I closed my eyes dutifully. “Ok, so now, when I say ‘go’ you guys holding their legs are going to start slowly, and I mean SLOWLY, lowering their feet towards the ground, keeping their legs as straight as you can. You guys on the ground, I want you to keep your eyes shut and tell your partner when you think your feet are about to hit the ground. When they do, you guys keep lowering them until they touch ok?”

My partner began slowly lowering my feet. After a few moments I felt as if my legs were close to being parallel with the ground and told her so. She

kept lowering them and I was amazed to feel like they were going through the space where I expected the ground to be. By the time they actually touched, a second or two later, it felt as if they were actually bending backward from my hip rather than lying straight. When I opened my eyes I found that my legs were in fact straight. Shaking my head, I smiled at my partner,

“That’s crazy.”

“Really? My turn!” she replied.

We switched spots and followed Connor’s directions as we repeated the activity in our reversed roles. I was amazed to hear her say she was almost at the ground when her feet were easily six inches above the dirt.

“Wow, that’s so cool!” she said when she opened her eyes.

After the ‘deadlegs’ activity, Connor led us through several similar activities before ending the session with us all lying on our backs as he guided us through a visualization.

“Ok, now that we’ve all taken a bunch of deep breaths, I want you to imagine you’re lying on a sunny beach. Feel the sand under you, hear the sound of the waves crashing on the shore, listen to the sea gulls calling as they fly over the water... Now I want you to imagine that you’re buried in sand from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. Don’t worry, it’s magic sand and you can breathe just fine through it but it’s so heavy, you can barely move a muscle. Can you feel it holding down your toes? Your hands? Your chest? Your head? Good. Now, imagine that it’s slowly, very, very slowly trickling off the very tips of your toes. You feel it falling slowly away, leaving your toes bare and you can feel the sun shining on them as a cool breeze across them. They are so light now, without the sand on them that they feel like they’re just floating there at the end of your feet. The rest of your body is still so-o-o heavy trapped under the sand but your toes are nice and light. Now the sand is trickling off your feet...” he droned on in his calm voice until ‘the sand’ had fallen away from the rest of our bodies, piece by piece, leaving us floating gently on the breeze.

“Ok, now I want you to take a deep breath and start waking up your body by gently shaking and moving until you’re ready to sit up again.” He sat quietly until everyone had finished ‘waking up’ and sat up.

I really enjoyed the session but having practiced visualization at home with my mom, I was reminded of her and once again felt that tug of loneliness. Despite feeling somewhat lonely and homesick, I felt myself relaxing during the visualization. As I sat waiting to talk with my cousin who was saying goodbye to her friend, I watched Connor chatting with two boys who he seemed to know from a previous summer. He sported a scruffy beard, an anti-apartheid t-shirt and Birkenstock sandals and had seemed genuinely interested in what we were doing throughout the session. I was surprised to find myself feeling relieved as I watched him joking and laughing with the boys. I had finally found someone to whom I could relate at camp. Even though I felt no urge to speak to him directly, I felt my anxiety lessen somewhat.

After her friend left, my cousin stayed behind to chat with me. I was too embarrassed to mention my homesickness and replied that I was “fine” when she asked how I was doing. She ran off to see her cabin mates during free time, and I made my way up the grassy slope to my own cabin. Once inside, I lay on my bunk pretending to read as the other girls played cards. With nothing to distract me, my thoughts turned once again to home. I thought about my mom, my sister, my dog and my aunt. I thought about snuggling up safe in my bed at night, about hanging out with my siblings and cousins and felt the weight of loneliness settled down on me once again. Even though I had had a fun day at camp so far, I still wanted to go home or at least call my mom. I was far too embarrassed to actually tell anyone, though, so I lay on my bunk trying to stop the tears from spilling down my cheeks and giving me away.

Finally, the bell rang and we headed down to the field to line up for dinner. Lining up with the rest of the campers, I noticed the lengthening of the shadows of the large pine trees that ringed the field. I gazed at the sky, seeing



the subtle changes that preceded the late midsummer sunset. Thinking about the end of the day somehow reminded me of home and I felt the cold loneliness creep back into my gut. Once again the meal seemed to go on around me as I sat toying with my food and doing everything I could to keep anyone from seeing how I felt. I listened to the chatter around me without really hearing what was said. I was so ashamed that I couldn't just join in their light-hearted fun. I thought of home, and all I wanted to do was see my mom and feel the comfort of her arms around me. I tried to imagine her voice telling me it's ok, that I'll be ok at camp, but that just made me feel more alone and ashamed of myself. I knew I'd be ok at camp. I wasn't frightened or really scared about anything in particular, just so very, very lonely. I just wanted to be home. Finally the meal was over and it was my turn to "clear and wipe". As I wiped down the table, Jen watched me.

"Are you ok? Have you been crying?" she asked curiously.

Her normal speaking voice somehow sounded like a shout to me. I was sure the entire dining hall had heard her question. Embarrassed, I ducked my head and pretended to be scrubbing at a stubborn piece of food stuck to the table.

"No," I managed in a normal voice. "I've got allergies."

Why did I lie like that? Why couldn't I just tell her I wanted to call home? The camp had told my mom we could call if we wanted. Why was I so embarrassed to admit it?

I could feel her watching me as I finished cleaning the table.

"Do you have meds for them?" she asked.

Oh crap, now she wouldn't believe my lie, "N-no."

"Oh. Well, if you feel really bad you can go down to the med-shack before lights out."

Whew, she believed it after all. I wished she hadn't, but I was glad she did. "K," I responded.

Somehow that lie made me feel even worse. That was my chance to say something, but the shame somehow overrode my other thoughts and I found

myself giving her that lame excuse before I'd even thought about it. What was I going to do about myself? I didn't want to stay at camp, but I didn't want to admit I wanted to go home.

Once the table was cleaned, we filed out of the dining hall. Standing on the steps, Jen told us we had some free time before campfire that night. She headed off with another counsellor, and my cabin group began to disperse, some girls heading back to the cabin, others to the various activity stations open during free time. I started to follow some of the other girls up the hill towards our cabin when I caught sight of my cousin Joe. He was walking towards me and looked very upset.

Six months younger than me, Joe and I had grown up living together as long as either of us could remember. He was one of the toughest kids I knew. It took an awful lot of emotion for Joe to look that upset.

"Hey, Amy."

"Hey, what's up?"

"I'm going home," he said flatly.

I was shocked. He actually said that out loud. Hearing it, I felt something loosen in my chest.

"Really?"

"Yeah, I don't like it here. I'm going to go find my counsellor so I can call home."

My protective sister instincts kicked in. I felt so sad for him that he'd been having a hard time.

"Me too."

Again, my voice was coming out of my mouth before I could think about what I was saying, but this time I was relieved.

Joe looked at me and nodded. The familiarity of the exchange, our brief way of communicating with each other, comforted me, bringing me back to myself. I felt the weight in my gut lift. We headed off towards the dining hall where Joe thought his counsellor, Mike, might be.

We found him sitting on the steps talking with a small group of other staff members.

“Hi Joe,” he said with a grin, “why aren’t you playing volleyball with the rest of the cabin?”

“I hate volleyball.”

“Oh, ok. Well it’s free time, so you can do whatever you like. I think they’ve got a soccer game going over on the lower field.”

“My cousin and I want to call home.”

“What?” The rest of the counsellors stopped talking amongst themselves. “Why? Let’s go for a walk and talk about this.”

We followed Mike away from the steps and sat with him under a nearby tree.

“So, you guys aren’t having a good time?”

“Nope.”

The determination in Joe’s face made me feel better. He didn’t care what anyone thought. I still cared, but wanted to call home anyway.

“Me neither,” I said.

“So, what don’t you like?”

“We just want to call home,” Joe said patiently.

“I know, but can’t we talk about this? What can we do to make things better?”

“Nothing, I just want to call my mom.”

“Well, I’m disappointed you won’t talk to me about what’s wrong.”

“We want to call home,” Joe repeated himself. I could see him getting frustrated. This guy didn’t seem to be listening.

“We’re just not having a good time and would like to call home,” I put it, wanting to help Joe.

I couldn’t put my finger on why I wasn’t having a good time. I couldn’t explain specifically what I didn’t like about camp. It felt like it was the whole thing: I didn’t like being at camp. There was no one thing that needed to be fixed and based on Joe’s lack of explanation, I assumed he felt the same way,

“Well, um, ok. Let’s go talk to Connor about this.”

Mike quickly stood up. We followed him towards the row of administrative buildings. I felt better. I liked Connor. He was cool. He’d arrange the call for us. Mike told us to wait outside of the office attached to the dining hall, so we sat on the steps and watched a chipmunk scavenging under a group of pine trees. We heard the door open behind us and the two older guys came out. Connor smiled at me in recognition.

“So, I hear you guys aren’t really enjoying yourselves here at camp?”

We nodded.

“Why not? Didn’t we have fun this afternoon in Jabberwocky?” he asked me.

I nodded, “Yeah, that was fun, but still, I want to call my mom.”

Admitting that to Connor was hard. I was still embarrassed, but since Joe seemed to think it was ok, I took the chance.

“But why? What don’t you like?”

“We just want to be at home.”

I could hear the frustration building in Joe’s voice. He was usually pretty even tempered, but he hated it when people didn’t listen to him.

“What do you do at home that you can’t do here?”

Connor’s questions surprised me. I didn’t think he’d give us a hard time about the call. They had told my mom we could call if we wanted to. That had actually been the final factor in Joe’s decision to come to camp; if he hated it, he could always call home. Suddenly, I felt betrayed and let down. Somehow, in my mind, Birkenstocks and an anti-apartheid shirt had meant mutual understanding. In my limited experience, there were people in the world who were “normal” and then there were those who understood my family and our values. At eleven, that division seemed clear and even though I knew it was possible that I was wrong in my assumptions, it hurt to find out Connor wasn’t on “our side”. His questions were not only hurtful, but I sensed he was trying to trick us into staying. Having had that experience with various adults trying to negotiate away my opinions, I had finely tuned radar for what my

mom called “manipulation”. I looked at Joe. The look he gave me back told me he recognised what Connor was trying to do too.

“Uh, lots of stuff,” he said slowly, as if that question was the stupidest thing anyone could have asked. “We just want to call home, ok?”

“Ok, but what kind of stuff?” Connor spoke in an easy-going, comfortable tone, as if he wasn’t completely ignoring our requests.

“Lots, dungeon and dragons, video games, books.”

“Yeah, and hanging out with our friends and our family.” I added. Joe nodded in agreement.

“Well, we can hang out and play dungeons and dragons here if you want.”

At Connor’s reply, Joe shot me a look that to me meant, ‘I can’t believe this guy, he can’t be this dumb’.

“Look, we want to call home.” I said flatly.

I was furious, all we wanted to do was call our moms, but this guy was turning everything around and trying to talk it us out of it. Deep down, part of me wanted to avoid this conflict, go quietly back to my bunk and just suffer through the rest of camp. But I knew there was no way Joe was going to back down, and I couldn’t leave him alone.

Looking over at Joe, I saw his expression change. His mouth hardened into a tight line, his eyes squinted just slightly and he slid his jaw forward. Those of us who grew up with him knew that face. If you were play-fighting or wrestling with him and you saw that face it meant you had lost, or at least that you might as well give up because you were going to lose; that face meant he was going to win this battle, no matter what it took. I was mad that Connor had pushed Joe to that point, but I was also really, really glad to be on his side when it happened.

“Why don’t you just try it for a couple more days, huh?” Connor smiled at us, his voice sounding forced and overly friendly. “If you still aren’t having any fun, you can call then.”

“Why don’t you just let us call home and try seeing how we feel after that, huh?” Joe replied, mimicking Connor’s voice with an edge of sarcasm.

Connor was not impressed by Joe’s response. This time, I watched his face tighten just slightly. “Wait here,” he said sharply.

He gestured to Mike and they went back inside the office.

Joe and I sat silently on the step, waiting. I was thinking how strange it was they were trying so hard to keep us from calling home. I mean, what was the big deal, really? It’s not like they could just keep us here. They’d have to let us phone home eventually. I guessed they just wanted to try talking us out of it in case we weren’t really that upset and would actually be ok to stay at camp.

Connor and Mike came back out of the office a few minutes later.

“So, let’s talk about how we can make you guys happy here at camp,” Connor said with a wide smile.

“So, let’s talk about how we can call home,” Joe retorted.

Connor’s smile vanished. “I called your house, while I was inside.”

I felt immediately better. Just knowing there was a connection with home, that we weren’t here alone after all, lifted some of the weight off my chest. If he’d called and talked to either my mom or my aunt, everything was going to be fine. There was no way my mom would make us stay at camp if we didn’t want to be here.

Connor continued, “and I talked to your Dad. He said you have to stay here at camp.”

My heart fell and I looked to Joe, unsure of how to react. I could see the disbelief and hurt I felt mirrored on his face. I was confused and felt a slow burn of anger building in my chest. How could this guy, this adult, who was supposed to be caring for us lie like that?

“Uh, neither of our dads live at our house and you don’t have their numbers,” Joe spoke slowly through a clenched jaw.

Connor blinked and looked at Mike. Quickly, he looked back at us, “Um, well, yeah, anyway, I meant your mom,” he stammered.

“My mom or her mom?” Joe asked.

Connor looked confused, having assumed we were siblings. “Uh, *your* mom,” he finally responded, pointing at Joe.

“My mom would never say that.” Joe said firmly, crossing his arm.

“Yeah, and my mom said we were allowed to call home from camp if we wanted to. She checked with the camp,” I added.

“Well, you can’t right now, ok? Someone’s using the phone.” Connor went back to his soft voice and gentle smile. “How about you go back to your cabins and we’ll talk about it tomorrow?”

I was furious. All thoughts about sticking it out and avoiding the conflict had vanished from my mind. How could he just lie to us? Did he think we wouldn’t see through it? Did he think we were idiots? They couldn’t just keep us here against our will. We had a right to be able to call our parents if we wanted to, if we needed to. Memories of being in a situation where that had been the case, when I hadn’t been allowed to call my mom, flooded back. There was no way in hell I was going to let that happen again. I looked at Joe. The anger flashing in his eyes told me he felt the same as I did.

“No,” I said, “we’re calling home tonight.” Joe nodded his support.

“No, you’re not,” Connor said coldly.

Joe looked at me. I could see the wheels turning beneath the anger. What were we going to do now?

Connor saw the look too. “Well, at least, not right now, ok? Let me go talk to the director and see what we can do.”

He was back to using his “nice” voice. He looked at Mike and jerked his head back toward the office door.

As soon as they were gone, Joe turned to me and said, “They’re not going to let us call-” his voice caught as tears welled in his eyes.

He stood up, and after I joined him, began walking down the path towards the main field. As we reached the open space between the cabins, the dining hall and the main parking lot, we saw my older brother Bobby coming towards us.

“Hey guys,” Bobby said.

“They won’t let us call home,” Joe said in a rush, fighting to keep his voice under control.

“What?”

“They said we could call home if we want to, but we asked and they won’t let us and they lied to us,” I explained.

Bobby looked around, embarrassed. “Well, I don’t know, maybe you should go back and talk to them about it some more?”

A group of older boys passed by and called out to him, “Hey Bobby, you coming to campfire or what?”

“Yeah, I’m coming.”

He waved his friends on before turning back to us. “I don’t know what you should do. I guess you should talk to the director or something? I’ve gotta go. I’ll talk to you later.”

With that, he ran off to join his friends as they made their way towards the large campfire area.

We watched him go. I was disappointed he didn’t help us, but I didn’t think there was much he really could have done. I looked over at Joe, he looked away as the tears that had been threatening to appear finally got the better of his control.

“Well, now what?” I asked.

“I’m leaving,” he said, his voice tight and hard.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m leaving. They won’t let us call so I’m leaving. You coming?”

Looking up at the setting sun, a little shiver of fear skittered down my back at the idea of leaving camp, but I knew that after the way they’d treated us, I couldn’t stay. I nodded. We trotted, side by side across the parking lot, past the camp vans, towards the rutted camp road.

\* \* \*



Midsummer dusk settled in as we made our way down a dirt road. We moved quickly, glancing behind almost frantically as we continued down the narrow track.

“Maybe we should just hide in the corn,” said Joe. “So they won’t, you know, find us.”

Even in the failing light, I could still see the evidence of the tears he so rarely shed as his reddened eyes scanned the fields that flanked either side of the camp road.

Glancing at the dark shadows between the rows of stalks that towered over my head, I suppressed a shudder. The thought of giving up and going back crossed my mind until I remembered the angry voices and the lies. No, I wouldn’t go back, but I most certainly did not want to spend the night hiding in some cornfield in the pitch dark not knowing what, or who, was out there too. Images of every movie monster and murderer I had ever seen flashed before my eyes.

“Um,” I hoped he couldn’t hear the fear in my voice, “maybe we should just keep going...I, I think there’s a house at the end of the road.”

“Ok,” he nodded, “we won’t hide unless they come after us” he said, as he turned to look behind us to confirm that, even after several minutes, no one was following us.

We jogged down the road until we reached its end. Looking around, we spotted a large farmhouse set back from the main road. Without any thought of the possible danger of two children approaching a strange house on their own, we headed up the long driveway. Halfway towards the house we heard an engine. Looking back, we could see one of the camp vans making its way slowly down the camp road.

Panic gripped my chest. If I had stopped to think, I probably would have realized they wouldn’t actually harm us for running away, but I didn’t stop to think. I bolted for the door. Fear was coursing through me, pushing my feet to run faster and faster. I was sure that, in their minds, we’d done something wrong and they would be mad at us. Even though I had no specific

reason to be afraid of their anger, I knew if a kid did something wrong and an adult was angry about it, the kid 'got in trouble'. I wasn't interested in knowing what that really meant. Reaching the door as the van pulled off the main road and onto the driveway, Joe and I started knocking loudly. An older woman smiled kindly as she opened the faded screen door.

"Can we use your phone?"

"We want to go home and they won't let us call home!" Joe and I burst out at the same time.

I hadn't realized I'd started crying until I spoke. I could tell from Joe's voice that he had been crying too.

Before she could answer, Connor had jumped out of the van and was jogging quickly toward us.

"Just come on back to camp, guys and we'll work this out."

"No," said Joe firmly.

"Oh, come on," Connor smiled easily at us, but his eyes looked tense.

"We want to call home," I said.

"You can. You can call from camp," Connor held out his hand as if he would guide us back to camp hand-in-hand, "I promise."

Joe shook his head. "I don't believe you," he said flatly and turned back to the woman in the doorway.

She smiled gently. "Well, if they don't, you can just come right back up here and call your parents from here ok?"

Connor looked shocked by her statement, but smiled at us again and gestured with his hand towards the van.

Joe and I looked at each other. He shrugged and I nodded. I didn't want to go back to camp with him, but now that I thought about it, I didn't really want to stay here with a stranger either. Without saying anything to Connor, we both turned and headed for the van where Mike and another male staff member were waiting. As we walked towards the van, we could hear Connor apologising profusely for any bother we had caused the woman.

She laughed, "Oh, don't worry about it, it happens *all* the time."

Connor spluttered another apology and hurried after us.

Joe shot me a look. I flashed him half a grin, knowing how embarrassed Connor was by all this. I couldn't help but feel glad that perhaps now he was wishing he'd just let us call in the first place. We piled into the van and climbed into the back seat as Connor jumped in the middle row and slammed the sliding door closed. No one spoke as the van turned around and drove back down the dirt road to camp. I was anxious, but also relieved. I didn't know for sure what would happen when we got back to camp and was worried about everyone being mad, but I was also relieved that it looked like we would be able to call home soon.

Once the van was parked back at camp, Connor opened the door and gestured for us to come out.

"Jim wants to see you," he said simply.

It took me a minute to remember that 'Jim' was the camp director.

"We want to call home," Joe sniped back.

"I know," Connor said in exasperation, "but you have to see Jim first."

Joe glared at him and then looked at me.

"Look," Connor said quickly before I could respond. "I promise, you can call you parents tonight, you just have to talk to Jim first."

I looked at Joe and he shrugged, so I nodded slowly,

"Fine, but if you don't let us call..."

"We will, I promise," Connor said.

I nodded and Connor led us to a small cabin sitting tucked in a grove of large pine trees behind the dining hall. Connor climbed the small set of stairs and knocked on the wooden door while we waited a few paces behind him. The door was opened by a heavysset middle-aged man with messy blonde hair.

"This is them?" he asked, looking past Connor at us.

Connor nodded. The other man disappeared back into the cabin and Connor gestured for us to follow him. We climbed the stairs and went in to find ourselves in what appeared to be a small dingy living room. The older man, Jim, pointed at the couch,

“Sit down.” His tone implied that we were, in fact, ‘in trouble’.

Joe and I sat side by side on the beat-up plaid couch. Jim remained standing in the middle of the room while Connor hovered near the doorway.

“So, just what do you two think you’re doing, running away like that?” he asked angrily as he glared first at Joe and then at me.

Joe shrugged, “We wanted to call home.”

“So you just run off?” Jim raised his voice slightly. “You think you can just run away like that?”

“Connor wouldn’t let us call,” I put in, thinking that maybe we just needed to explain why we had had to run away.

“Yeah, and my mom said we could call if we wanted-”

“But that doesn’t mean you can just run off,” Jim cut Joe off angrily. “You can’t just take things into your own hands like that.”

That I didn’t understand. Take what into our own hands? Our own lives? *We* didn’t want to be at camp so *we* left. In whose hands should that decision have been?

“But we didn’t want to stay, and you wouldn’t let us call!” Joe retorted angrily, pointing out that their actions were what had resulted in us running away.

“You can’t just leave!” Jim’s voice got louder, “you didn’t even give us a chance to talk about it,”

“But-” I wanted to explain we had tried talking to Connor, but he wouldn’t let us call.

“Don’t you interrupt me,” Jim snapped. “I don’t like either of your attitudes.”

He glared at us as he paced up and down the small room in front of us.

“Well, we don’t like being lied to.” Joe snapped back with a glare of his own.

Jim spun around to fire another glare at Joe, “Don’t-” he said sharply, leaning forward and jabbing his finger at us, “be snarky.”

I didn't really know what 'snarky' actually meant, but his tone frightened me. He was getting really mad and it didn't seem like any amount of explaining or discussion would help. Again, I was confused. Why did he want us to come in here if he didn't want to talk about what had happened and why we did what we did? I couldn't remember ever having an adult speak to me like that, with that much anger, and I was scared by it.

Connor shifted on his feet and Jim turned to look at him. Jim crossed to the counsellor and spoke quietly with him for a moment. I could feel the tears begin to start again. For some reason, I couldn't turn and look at Joe. At this point, I just wanted it all to be over and didn't want to think about what we'd do if they wouldn't let us call home.

After a brief discussion, Jim turned back to us. "All right, go on then," he said, and gestured toward Connor over his shoulder with his thumb.

We stood up and shuffled past him to follow Connor back outside. Connor took us in the back door of the dining hall to an old phone hanging on the wall in the large kitchen.

"Ok, go ahead."

He leaned back against a steel countertop with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

I looked at Joe. He made no move for the phone, so I picked it up and dialled our home number.

"Hello?" My adult cousin, Sharon had picked up. The sound of her familiar voice brought a sudden rush of tears.

"Hi, Sharon? It's Amy, is my mom there?" I struggled to get the words out over the large lump in my throat.

"Uh, yeah, sure Ames, just a sec." I could hear her shifting the phone in her hand, "Lauren, the phone's for you!" she called for my mom.

There was a pause and then I heard her speaking hushed tone to but couldn't make out what she said.

"Hi Amy, hon, is everything ok?" she asked, sounding worried. As she spoke I felt my control slipping.

“Hi mom,” I managed before my breath caught as I suppressed a sob. “Joe and I don’t like camp,” I said in a rush. The walls I had built to keep my emotions in check over the past day and half were crumbling fast.

“Oh no? Oh dear. Well, what’s going on? What don’t you like?” She sounded concerned, but the serious worry had left her voice.

“We don’t like it,” my voice broke as I realized what an understatement that was, but with Connor standing there listening, I didn’t know how to explain to her what had happened. Overwhelmed with emotions, I was hurt, sad, angry, a little frightened and suddenly very tired.

“Oh? Well, maybe you just need to give it a couple of days?” She asked gently.

“No, we want to come home.”

How could I tell her that what had started as simply not having a good time had turned into so much more. The fear I felt running down the road, the betrayal of the lies, and that awful confrontation with the director.

“Ok, ok honey. Well, is your counsellor there with you?”

Why was she asking about Jen? I hadn’t even seen Jen since dinner.

“No-o.” I said slowly.

“Isn’t there any staff member there?” She sounded shocked.

“Oh yeah, Connor’s here.”

“Well, can I talk to him for a minute?”

“Ok.”

I was worried about handing over the phone and losing the connection with her.

“But mom, we really, *really* want to come home,” I said, not wanting Connor to tell her anything that might confuse that issue.

“Ok hon. I know,” she said reassuringly.

Her caring tone pushed me over the edge and a single sob escaped as I handed the phone to Connor. Sniffing hard with my head down, I moved aside and tried desperately to stop my tears. When I looked up, I found Joe watching me, tears in his eyes as well.

I didn't know what to say to him. I didn't know what my mom was saying to Connor. I shrugged, "She wanted to talk to him," I said simply. "But I told her."

Joe nodded. We both stood with our backs against the steel counter, watching Connor.

He stood with his back to us, facing the wall. After a brief conversation with my mom he turned back to us and gestured with the phone, "She wants to talk to you again."

I took the phone back, "Mom?" I almost lost my composure again.

"Hey baby. Ok, so I talked to Connor and he said you guys are pretty upset. Betty and I can come out there and see you. Connor wants us to wait until tomorrow, but I told him it's up to you. Do you want us to come see you tonight or in the morning?"

"Tonight," I said quickly.

"Ok, what about Joe?"

I held the receiver against my chest, "They're coming to see us. Do you want your mom to come tonight or tomorrow?" I asked him.

"Now," he said.

I nodded and put the phone back to my ear, "He wants Betty to come tonight too."

"Are you sure baby? You don't want to try one more night?"

"No. I'm sure," I looked at Joe, "and so is Joe."

"Ok. Well then, we'll be out there as soon as we can."

"Ok." I felt the tears rising again, knowing the conversation was ending.

"Take care of yourself until we get there, ok?"

"Mmm hmm."

"Can you put Joe on so he can talk to Betty before we leave?"

"Ok. Bye mom."

It was all I could do not to break down. She was coming. We were going home.

“Bye baby, see you soon.”

“Uh huh.” I held the phone out to Joe, “Your mom wants to talk to you.”

Joe talked quietly with his mom for a few minutes. I looked over at Connor, who had resumed his position of leaning against the counter with his arms crossed. He caught me looking at him and returned the look without a smile or any other reaction. I suddenly felt very ashamed of my tearstained face and what I’m sure were red and puffy eyes. I was so angry at him for lying to us, for letting Jim get angry at us and for not listening to us in the first place, but I was also ashamed that things had gone so far, that we had gotten so upset.

Joe said goodbye to his mom and hung up the phone. Connor simply stood and walked out of the kitchen.

“Well, everyone else is at campfire, but if your parents are coming you might as well just wait here.”

He pointed at the wooden steps that led of the small deck which surrounded the dining hall where we had had our first conversation with him. Joe and I sat side by side on one end of the steps and after a moment, Connor sat on the other end. We sat there quietly waiting for what seemed like an eternity.

Finally, as it was just starting to get really dark, we saw headlights turn into the parking lot. Joe and I stood up. I was suddenly nervous and embarrassed once again. I wanted to go home and couldn’t wait to see my mom, but somehow I also was embarrassed to have her here at camp.

My mom and my aunt climbed out of our large van and walked towards us.

“Hi guys!” My aunt said brightly.

They hugged us before turning to Connor who stood back waiting.

“Hi,” My mom said, “you must be Connor.”

He nodded.



“Well, we were thinking we’d take a bit of a walk with the kids and talk to them. Is that ok with you?”

He nodded again, “I’ll just be in the office there.” He pointed at the office door next to the kitchen.

“Ok, thank you.” My mom turned back to face me as Connor turned and walked back towards the office. “Hon, why don’t you and I take a walk while Betty and Joe talk?”

I nodded and kept pace beside her as she strolled over the field. I told her what had happened, that they wouldn’t let us call, that they lied to us about calling for us and then about how Joe and I had run away. She didn’t seem surprised. I wasn’t able to hear what he’d said to her over the phone back in the kitchen but I guessed that Connor must have told her most of that already. She knew we ran away but I doubted that he had told her about his lie; that sort of detail didn’t seem like the type of thing adults admitted to each other. I told her Jim had been angry at us for running away. I didn’t tell her the details of the exchange, but somehow thought she’d understand what a big deal it was because she never really got angry with us. Not like that. The worst that ever happened in our house was heated debate and her talking to us about how we felt or why we did something. I couldn’t remember her ever speaking in tones close to what Jim had used, to us kids or any other adult.

“He was probably just scared you might get hurt.”

I shook my head, “No, he just said we shouldn’t have run away and he got *really* mad at Joe.”

She nodded, but I don’t think she really understood. “So what are we going to do now?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, do you want to come home or do you want to try it for a couple more days?”

“I want to come home,” I said quickly. “I don’t want to stay here,” I added firmly.

“Are you sure?”

I was surprised to hear what sounded like disappointment in her voice. I thought she was trying to hide it, but that really, she was kind of upset I couldn't make it through camp. I felt bad for causing such a fuss and making her feel bad, but I also knew she would support me leaving if that's what I really wanted to do.

“Yeah, I can't stay.”

My voice cracked once again as I felt tears once again prickling behind my eyes. I sighed, I was so tired and sick of crying.

“Ok,” she put her arm around me, “ok sweetie, we'll go home then.”

We walked back to the parking lot where my aunt and cousin were waiting. My mom went and got Connor who said that it was past lights out, but that if we hurried we could go collect our things before our cabin mates fell asleep. My mom asked him to let Bobby and Shannon know that we were leaving. Betty and Joe headed towards the hill where the boys' cabins were and my mom followed me back to my cabin. I was deeply embarrassed to have to face my cabin mates, but I was excited and relieved to finally be leaving. With my mom's help I quickly gathered my stuff, and crammed it back in my duffle bag. I guess someone must have explained what was going on to Jen, and that she'd then explained it to the other girls, because no one asked any questions about what we were doing. One of the other girls eventually asked why I was leaving.

I shrugged, “ ‘cause I don't want to stay.” Was all I could say.

Jen came over and put her arm around my shoulder, “I hope you come back next year,” she said brightly.

Again, I shrugged, annoyed that she had practically ignored me for the whole time, but then acted all upset now that I was leaving.

I said a quick goodbye and followed my mom back to the parking lot. Connor was waiting by the van and I was glad to see that Jim was no where in sight. Connor said Bobby and Shannon were told about us leaving, but they were ok and were already getting ready for bed.

He helped us load our bags into the van and waved goodbye as we drove back down the camp road. I rested my head against the seat back and sighed. I slept most of the ride home, soothed by the motion and the darkness. Back home, I settled happily into my own bed. It had only been one night, but after everything that had happened that evening, it had felt like years since I was comfortable and happy. I fell asleep easily that night and spent a fun morning the next day telling my little sister the story of our running away. I made it out to be an adventure, with Joe adding details here and there, but couldn't bring myself to tell her how it really felt, how scared and angry I'd been. How confusing and frustrating it had been dealing with the adults involved. I didn't know if it was embarrassment or just that I didn't want to relive it all, but Joe didn't correct my version of the story. We were home and we left it at that.

## **5.2 *More than just having fun in the woods, camp is...***

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming out to our presentation tonight. My name is Sandra Collings and I've been the director at Tabinguwa for almost ten years now. I have been spending a large portion of my summers there, however, for over thirty years, starting out as a camper at age seven and moving on to become a junior counsellor at eighteen, a senior staff member at twenty five and finally the director when our founder, Thomas Hollaway, or "Tipper" as we like to call him at camp, retired in the late nineties. Tonight, I'm going to tell you a little bit about "Tab," about our philosophy and what your children will experience there, should you decide to enrol them this summer. On the screen behind me, you'll see a collection of pictures taken at Tab that I hope will enhance my presentation and give you a better understanding of what our camp is all about.

First, I want to tell you about the physical setting so you can picture what I'm talking about. Set on Doe Lake, a few hours North of Toronto, Camp Tabinguwa is definitely on the rustic end of the camp spectrum. Our camp buildings are nestled in the woods and the only grass we have at camp is on our sports field; the rest of our 140 acres is covered in the old growth forest that Tipper fell in love with when he chose the site back in the 1950's. The lake and forest are full of a wide assortment of animals and most campers have at least one "wildlife" sighting during their session, and I'm not counting mosquitoes. Deer, racoons, chipmunks, turtles, fish and a wide range of birds are sighted on camp grounds every summer.

Our cabins have limited electricity and our campers and staff alike share communal washrooms, which are dispersed between the cabins. We do not allow campers to bring cell phones, personal games, iPods or any other personal electronics to camp because we feel that camp is a time to get away from these types of individual activities and these types of electronics interfere with the camper's ability to connect with the natural environment at

camp. Our kids fall asleep listening to the loons on the lake, sit chatting face-to-face with friends while watching the sun set over trees and engage in friendly competition directly with their peers in any number of physical activities. We feel these authentic and real, as opposed to digital or simulated, experiences are an important part of their development.

Our campers sleep in cabins, with between nine and ten other campers and two staff members. Our counsellors sleep right in the cabins with the kids, which, we think, creates a special kind of bond between the young adult staff and the campers that doesn't happen in many other settings. As older adolescents or young adults, our staff can relate to the campers in a different way than say their teachers at school can and the campers are aware of this distinction. They are closer in age, but at the same time have a level of maturity and experience that the campers can look up to and emulate. Campers have told me that they see our staff as a combination of role models, friends, caregivers and older siblings. They love that they get to spend their time at camp with friendly, supportive, energetic and "cool" older kids who are focused on ensuring that they have a great time. Having our staff sleep with the campers in their cabins not only means that the counsellors are right there in the night in case a camper needs anything, it also creates deeper relationships within our community as both staff and kids see each other at their best and worst moments of the day. It's one thing for campers to meet their counsellor after they have showered, dressed, had breakfast and mentally prepared themselves for that day's program. It's quite another for campers to see that staff member just as they tumble out of bed and to spend pretty much all day, every day with that person. To us, community is a very important part of camp, and I think that our sense of community really starts in the cabin. Each camper spends his or her time eating, sleeping and playing with the same small group of kids and as he or she gets older, we do our best to maintain those cabin groups so that what starts as a bunch of strangers sleeping in the same room together turns into a group of close knit friends.

Campers have seen me in my pyjamas, they've seen me before I've brushed my hair in the morning and they've seen me spill spaghetti down the front of my shirt. At camp, our relationships are much more like a family than, say in a school setting, because we have these types of interactions and because we spend so much time in such close quarters throughout the day. This type of contact breaks down some of the traditional social barriers we carry with us as we move through the world and allows for deeper, more genuine relationships based on our authentic identities. When you spend all day and night with someone, you can't hide behind a mask or keep one part of your life separate from the others. At camp, you are who you are and I've watched, year after year, as kids slowly embrace their genuine selves and then begin to thrive as they let go of who they think they should be, or who they think others think they should be, and embrace who they are.

Coupled with the intense amount of time we spend together, this deeper, more authentic type of relationship leads to a special kind of friendship. I can't tell you how many times I've heard from campers, staff and alumni that "my camp friends are my best friends". I was at a wedding last fall where the bride and groom not only met at Tab, but most of their wedding party were former Tab campers and counsellors. In fact, *my* best friends still are the girls I spent my summers with at Tab. As our lives have changed over the years, we've moved apart and gone on very separate paths, but if you get us together for an alumni reunion or even just dinner at one of our houses, it's like we're right back in our cabin chatting after lights out. No matter how many years pass between our reunions, we're still as close as ever.

Most of our campers return year after year, and the vast majority of our staff members were campers with us when they were younger. This connection to camp allows us to maintain our community because it means that it's mostly the same group of people coming back every year; with the exception of the new members we are happy to welcome into our group every summer, of course. Friendships formed at camp last for years. I personally have watched most of our current staff grow up from when they first came to

junior camp at age seven. There's a family-like connection that develops at camp, and while I cannot speak directly for my staff, when I was a counsellor, I saw my senior staff supervisor as an older sister, and we all saw Tipper as a sort of uncle-slash-older brother-slash-father figure.

Another way we build and maintain our Tab community is through our traditions and programs. Events such as singing the camp song every morning at flag raising, our opening and closing campfires, held on the first and last nights of every session, camp wide games, such as last year's colour war, and other activities that bring the entire camp together, remind us of the larger camp community to which we all belong. These events help campers create connections: with other campers; with counsellors and staff; and with the history and legacy of Tab itself. Tipper likes to say that "Camp Tabinuwa exists on Doe Lake, but Tab exists in the hearts and minds of her campers". If your son or daughter joins us this summer, they too will become a part of that Tab community and will get the chance to share in its rich history.

At Tab, we always have been and always will be a co-ed camp, believing that part of healthy childhood development involves sharing experiences with kids of both your own and the opposite sex. That being said, we obviously have single sex cabin groups and try to include a few single gender activities in each session, such as girls or boys-only sleepovers where all of our campers and staff of one gender have a large sleepover in the rec hall, watching movies and playing games together. We also do things like boys or girls-only swim time or basketball tournaments. Our goal with these activities is to allow the campers to experience these types of activities in a single gendered environment where perhaps they will be less self-conscious or concerned about appearances. We all know that, for most kids, once they hit "that age," the idea of doing something that might be seen as "stupid" or even "uncool" in front of members of the opposite sex is worse than the idea of getting a root canal without anaesthesia. These single gender activities give the campers a break from those social pressures. The feedback we get from our campers is that they see these activities as a very special and important

part of camp where they can bond with their peers and feel more free to ‘play around’ or try something new. We feel that by combining both co-ed and single gendered activities we can give our campers the best of both worlds.

While some of our programming separates the different age groups, because of obvious differences with regard to abilities and skill level, we feel it’s also important to provide opportunities for the different age groups to mix and ensure that campers get to spend time with kids of all ages. This type of programming allows older campers to take on more leadership oriented roles and allows younger campers to develop relationships with their older counterparts. We see this mixing of ages as an important part of our community building and do our best to encourage campers to maintain these relationships throughout the session.

Now, some parents worry about how their child will adapt to this rather intense social situation, especially kids who are only children and are perhaps not used to sharing their space so closely with other children. And to be honest with you, I have yet to see a cabin go an entire session without some kind of conflict. While I know it’s not easy for the campers and counsellors involved, I wouldn’t change that fact. To me, a large part of camp is learning to get along with others. If you throw ten kids and two staff members together in a small space and have them eat, sleep and breathe together almost constantly for three weeks, eventually someone is going to rub someone the wrong way or someone else’s habits are going to drive someone absolutely bonkers. To me, though, this is an opportunity for learning, growth and relationship development.

During staff training, we spend an extensive amount of time on problem solving and conflict resolution skill development. Our staff come to camp, not only with their own camp experiences to draw from, but also with explicit training from some of the best professional workshop facilitators in the business. We make sure that before your child even arrives at camp, his or her counsellor has a solid toolbox of techniques and theory that will help them help your child to learn to resolve his or her own issues. To me, that is one of



the most important skills we will teach your child this summer. In life, there will always be situations in which he or she finds him or herself at odds with someone else: at school, on the sports fields or playgrounds and, later in life, in the workplace. If we can help them develop the skills to get along at camp, in these intense social situations, I guarantee they will be more successful in dealing with conflict in other settings.

So, now that you have an idea about some of the philosophy and the bigger picture part of camp, I'd like to walk you through a typical day at Tab. Well, as much as we ever have a typical day.

Each morning, the campers are woken by the camp bell. The first wakeup bell calls all those who would like to participate in a morning dip, run or hike. Staff members meet the campers at various designated spots and lead them in their chosen activities. Approximately an hour later, the second wakeup bell rings and lets the entire camp know that breakfast will be starting in approximately half an hour. Everyone else gets up at that point, showers and otherwise gets ready for the day before meeting with their cabin group in front of the dining hall to join the rest of the camp for flag raising. After a nutritious breakfast, campers get to choose their activities for two of the day's programming sessions. They can choose between a wide range of activities such as: additional swimming or canoeing time, sailing, rock climbing, camp craft, arts and crafts, pottery, drama, baseball, basketball, soccer, tennis, horseback riding, mountain biking and what we like to call "grab bag" where one staff member chooses their favourite other kind of activity and leads the kids in participating in it. In the past, we've had grab bags of juggling, tree climbing, cloud watching, air bands, swing dancing and a host of other wacky ideas. There are lots of other activities I haven't listed here because, honestly, there are too many for me to remember at once and they change from day to day depending on staff availability, materials and the weather. I have yet to find a camper, though, who could not find something they wanted to do during these sessions. Based on the feedback we receive, I feel confident in saying that we really do have something for everyone. In fact, most of the

time, our kids have trouble choosing between the available activities they want to do.

Our campers tell us that they enjoy the chance to try things they don't have the opportunity to try at home and that they especially enjoy being able to freely choose their activities. We've found that more and more children are participating in after school programs and a great number of extracurricular activities, which is fantastic, but what we are hearing from the kids themselves is that they do not have the same amount of freedom or range of choice in their activities at home as they do at camp. We see this part of our program as another area that is very valuable for your child's development. The ability to choose their own activities, to try out something they've never done before or to choose to specialize in one specific activity, allows them to assert their independence while still participating in valuable, educational and fun activities. At camp, they have the freedom to choose what they want in a safe setting that guarantees not only their safety, but also skilled and experienced instruction.

I'm sure many of you are sitting there thinking "oh, I bet my Jackie would pick swimming" or soccer or climbing or whatever, but you'd be surprised how often I hear from parents that their child has chosen activities they never even knew he or she was interested in or that were the total opposite of what they do at home. This is essentially why we include this element of choice. It allows kids to be free to experiment and try things they were perhaps scared to try at home or at school; to try on a different persona through their choices in activities and feel free to change that new persona for something different if they don't find it fits. Not only are they allowed to choose new activities at camp but our staff support them in these choices by recognising that moving outside one's comfort zones can be a little uncomfortable, if not outright frightening. In pre-camp training I tell my staff that no child ever fails at camp and that it's their job to make sure that every time a child participates in an activity, he or she feels successful. Whether they meet a concrete goal of skill development or simply have fun muddling

through a first attempt at something, our staff make sure that campers walk away from their activity stations with a positive experience. Looking at the bigger picture, we allow and even encourage campers to move beyond what they've "always done" and try something new in a supportive environment that stresses fun and enjoyment over everything else.

This element of choice also is a fundamental part of our philosophy of "challenge by choice." At Tab, we believe in encouraging campers to stretch out of their comfort zones and challenge their own ideas of their limitations, but we believe they need to be able to do so at their own pace. Every child is different and every camper is different every time they come back to camp. Our program respects this, while also supporting campers and encouraging them to set goals and challenge themselves. Our staff members are focused on helping your child choose his or her own challenges and working with him or her to reach his or her own goals.

At Tab, we believe strongly that children thrive with structured goals and concrete recognition of their achievements, which is why many of our activities include a badge system, which allows campers to track their progress during the session and from year to year. While some activities, such as arts and crafts, do not lend themselves to this type of program, every camper at Tab participates in swimming lessons and canoeing on a regular basis and will receive badges corresponding to their progress in these areas at the end of the session. That way, everyone gets some concrete measurement and acknowledgement of their progress no matter what they choose during their free time. Aside from the bonus of each camper receiving recognition for their achievement during the session, we have chosen these two activities, in particular, for mandatory participation because we see swimming as a life skill that every child should learn and because, given our extensive out tripping program, every Tab camper needs to develop and maintain their paddling skills.

To get back to our daily schedule though, the majority of our standard camp day is broken into four main sessions: two in the morning and two in

the afternoon. Each day, your child will spend one session at either swimming lessons or canoeing (we alternate groups between the two on a daily basis) one session at an activity with their cabin group and two sessions at the activities of their choice. In between these sessions, campers have down time to spend just hanging out with their friends, participating with their cabin mates in “cabin cleanup” or doing quiet activities such as reading, writing home or napping. Every evening after dinner we have different activities ranging from campfires or games (such as capture the flag) to cabin group activities or special events such as dances or skit nights which keep the campers occupied until it is time for them to return to their cabins before lights out. So, that is what you can expect your child to be doing approximately seventy five percent of their time at camp.

Now, you might be asking, what about the other twenty five percent? Along with these types of “typical days” at Tab, every camper goes “on trip,” meaning a wilderness camping experience, usually done in the form of a canoe trip. Our youngest cabins paddle across Doe Lake and camp on one of our many islands for a night or two. Our oldest groups do a seven day trip, often in the interior of picturesque Algonquin Park. Whatever their age though, every camper is involved with the trip preparation. Helping choose and package the food for their meals, ensuring the proper equipment is packed and going over the route on a map are some of the activities your child will participate in before their trip, with varying levels of independence depending on his or her age and experience with wilderness camping.

Essentially, we see these trips as having two main areas of impact on our campers. First, it allows them to experience the natural wilderness setting in an entirely different manner. Paddling across a misty lake first thing in the morning, listening to the sound of the rain falling on their tent, portaging over rocks and through mud, these are all experiences that allow the camper to have a more direct interaction with the natural world. We teach the children to practice “no trace” camping and include a strong emphasis of conservation and respecting wild spaces in these trips. What we want for each camper is for

him or her to come back to camp with a deeper personal connection to nature and a better understanding of his or her personal impact on our planet.

Second, these trips present a new set of challenges for campers to overcome. From paddling through the rain and having to cooperate with their cabin mates even when they're all tired and hungry at the end of the day, from sleeping on bumpy ground to going without proper washrooms, these trips require campers to test their own limits and persevere when faced with less than ideal situations. Now, this may sound like a little too much "roughing it" to some of you, but it's not like we're sending your kids out there to struggle against the elements all alone. Every single counsellor at Tab has extensive tripping experience and they use this experience to support their campers and help them overcome these challenges. Whether it's just a word of encouragement when the going gets rough or knowing when to step in and mediate a conflict, our staff work hard on trip to ensure that while everyone gets challenged, no one is asked to do anything beyond their personal limits.

I try to meet each group as they return from their trip, and it's amazing how different the kids can seem after only a few days away. They develop a greater sense of their personal capabilities and strengths and they certainly show increased abilities when it comes to paddling and camp craft, but to me it seems like the biggest change is the increase in personal confidence and inner strength. You can see in their eyes that they're proud to have persevered, that they made it through something important and they know it.

So, while trips make up part of that other twenty five percent of your child's time at camp, they do not account for all of our "special schedule" activities. We also have days at camp during which we do not follow our standard daily program. Each camp session has at least one theme day, which is something all together different from our regular programming. On these days, our programming is designed to match that individual theme. Some of our favourite theme days in the past were: superhero day, medieval day, "Tab-lympics", backwards day, space invaders and the wild west. Basically, on a theme day, the campers wake up to an entirely different camp experience: the

staff dress up and take on character roles to match the theme, we spend the day participating in theme-based camp-wide games and challenges and even our meals are set up to match the theme. While there are certainly ample opportunities for campers to learn and develop different skills on theme days, from a programming standpoint, these days are mostly just about having fun, which is a fundamental part of camp life. I know I've talked a lot about development and learning opportunities at camp, but another important part of our philosophy is that camp should be fun. Sure, your kids will learn a lot and grow in a lot of different ways at camp, but at the same time, we want them to see camp as a place for them to relax and have fun with their friends. These theme days are generally described by campers as some of their "funnest" memories of camp.

Despite our other agendas for development and growth, if we can't help a camper have fun, we see it as our failure. At Tab, we like to say that camp is a different type of place where you can cut loose, leave everything else behind and just have fun being yourself. My first year as director, I spoke with a young camper as she was lining up for the bus home and I asked her what she thought of her time at camp. She'd been quite homesick the first couple of days and had struggled with making friends a little, but with the support of her counsellors, she found her place and seemed to enjoy herself for the remainder of the session. Anyway, on that last day, I asked her what she thought about camp, now that she'd made it through the session, and she said, "it's kind of hard, and there's lots to do and stuff, but mostly I liked it because it was just fun." To me, that really kind of just sums it all up. Yes there are challenges and campers do face some hardships, but ultimately, it's about being free to have fun in a safe and supportive environment.

All in all, what I like to tell parents is that basically camp is a place where your child has a chance to hang out with other kids, try some new activities and stretch their wings a little. In today's world, it's hard to give kids the chance to try things on their own while also ensuring their safety, but at camp, that's exactly what we offer. Now, I cannot stand here and tell you

that your child will have a perfectly smooth experience at camp without any conflict or challenges, without ever feeling uncomfortable or upset. What I can promise you, however, that at Tab, what they will have is a *perfect camp* experience, which includes the odd bump in the road, and that it's our job to make sure that any bumps your child may experience are manageable and that there is plenty of support on hand to ensure that he or she succeeds, has fun and learns a lot.

Thank you very much for your attention. If you have any questions about Tab or about the summer camp experience in general, I'd be happy to answer them.

## **6.0 Questioning the currents: the reflections of a hippy kid struggling to find understanding in the mainstream (Discussion)**

*As I reflect on what these two narratives have to say about the experience of camp in our society, I think there are obviously very distinct elements contained in each. In representing two very opposing experiences, I struggled, at first, with how to discuss and analyze them. How should I analyze and compare two representations that are so obviously opposed? Was I simply going to be stating the obvious? How do you critically analyze the themes found in something you wrote based on the themes you took from somewhere else? Isn't that somehow cheating? What do you do when the essences and meanings you feel in something just don't want to fall neatly into discrete, academically sound, thematic categories? I started and restarted writing this section countless times, each time feeling like I was doing it wrong, like I was cheating or missing something.*

*I felt there was more in the narratives than I was getting at, that there was something else to be fleshed out, but I could not see exactly what it was or how I should go about finding it. So I went looking on Google scholar for inspiration, and after reading some wonderful articles using "non-traditional" methodologies, realized I was over-thinking things, as usual, and trying to force my thoughts into some sort of structure that really just didn't match. So, instead of trying to abstractly construct my "Discussion Section" and formally analyze my research, I took some deep breaths, put some mindful music on my headphones and settled in to enjoy writing about my narratives on a quiet Saturday in an almost deserted department.*



I believe these two narratives both speak volumes about the camp experience and could stand alone as representations of that experience, leaving the interpretation and meaning-making up to the reader. In this study, however, I am focusing on what we can learn by comparing them and what they say about the phenomenon of camp when viewed together as two parts of a whole. I am therefore going to explore these narratives and guide my readers through my interpretation of both narratives as they stand together focusing on what they have to tell us about the camp experience as a whole.

The fact that these two pieces are based on very different source materials could be argued to detract from the relevance of their comparison. Since the autoethnography is based upon my specific experience and the director's narrative is based upon interviews initially focused on camp outcomes, their comparability could be questioned but I feel that the transcripts of the interviews, what the directors actually said, makes this comparison valid. When asked about the outcomes of their programs, the directors offered a great deal of detail describing what their campers experience as a way of explaining the outcomes. In discussing these outcomes, the directors identified what they considered to be the most important parts of their programs as well as the scope of experiences they understand their campers to be having. While asking the directors specifically about the camper's experiences as a whole might result in some minor differences, I believe that based on the directors' comments, and the comprehensive list of topics they discussed, these interviews do reflect an image of the camp experience.

To me, the description of camp that came out of these interviews is actually potentially more accurate or honest in its portrayal of the directors' perspectives as it is constructed from what they consider to be the most important or impactful elements of the experience, rather than what the directors think they think the camp experience is like. When asked directly an

individual might list a relatively abstract collection values or attributes about herself but when her everyday behaviour or her identification and description of important moments of her life are analyzed, one might gain a totally different image of the individual. In this same manner, these interviews offer us insight into the directors' perspectives based on the elements they identify as important and how they describe the lived experiences of these elements. As such, they present one perspective on their understanding of their campers' experiences. I am not going to debate which approach would garner the more "true" perspective, using these interviews or asking directly, but I do argue that my comparison is valid as the directors very clearly articulate a comprehensive and detailed description of the camp program.

The fact that the directors are, for the most part, not speaking about their own experiences but rather their understanding of the experiences of others is another area in which it could be argued that my comparison is invalid. The purpose of this study, however, is to explore adult perspectives and assumptions about children's experiences, not to explore how adults perceive their own childhood experiences. With this purpose in mind, this comparison is essentially the point of the study; to explore the presumed experience versus an example of the actual lived experience.

Upon first read, the differences between the experiences themselves, as described in the narratives, are painfully obvious. My experience is almost wholly negative while the director paints a rosy picture in which even conflict is a beneficial experience. My challenge in writing this discussion section rests in the notion that this contrast is at once the entire point of this study and yet only the tip of the iceberg. On the surface, one could discount this entire paper by writing off my experience as just an aberration, that the staff at my camp handled the problem poorly, or that my cousin and I just did not like camp, and that it therefore says nothing about the camp

experience in general or our societal perspectives in regard to children's experiences as a whole. Similarly, the director's narrative could also be dismissed as an idealistic image described by professionals hoping to show their life's work in the best light possible. What happens, though, when we probe both of these contrasting and stereotypical, perhaps even archetypal in their extremity, narratives and poke around under the surface to see what societal mechanisms are holding together their basic structures? The extremity of these examples could be used to dismiss any attempts to relate them to these larger societal mechanisms, but I believe they simply make these elements more visible and are therefore more easily discussed.

As I re-read the narratives and reflected on the stories they tell, it struck me that several common issues in the representations of the camp experience resulted in, for the most part, contrasting outcomes and very different descriptions of how the experience would be/was lived. These specific issues touched upon in both narratives can loosely be collected into two areas I hope will organize my discussion and interpretation for the reader. The areas of similarity between the narratives essentially fall in to the categories of *people* and *program* oriented elements. The *people* category includes the various elements of each narrative that relate to the social side of the camp experience, while the *program* category includes those linked to specific elements of residential summer camp programs. Through the exploration and discussion of these common elements I will explore what these two narratives have to say when presented together as two sides of the same experiential phenomenon.

## **6.1 People**

Exploring the general social atmosphere in both narratives, I saw some similarities and some dissimilarities in how four areas of social elements were portrayed. The common elements

of social interaction that I found in both narratives are: (1) independence, or being away from a familial support system; (2) living under the care of adolescent counsellors; (3) the sense of community at camp; and (4) the degree of intimacy in the interpersonal relationships. While some of these elements are also related to elements of the camp programs, their social impacts and implications stood out for me.

In my autoethnography, the issue of my loneliness at camp is a reoccurring element of the narrative and was a particularly difficult facet to write about. Basically, from the moment my mother left, I felt homesick and lonely. In the other narrative, the camp director speaks several times about camp offering children the chance to try things on their own and to learn to deal with their own problems. In that narrative, being away from their families allows children to “find themselves,” develop new skills, and learn to face challenges on their own. The camp directors’ interviews, which were the basis for the second narrative, include several references to this concept, namely that residential camps give children the opportunity to be independent and deal with challenges away from what is suggested to be unnecessary parental support and involvement. The director extols this element of the camp experience as a source of healthy growth and development.

In my narrative, however, not only did I experience loneliness and homesickness, but when I felt betrayed and helpless in the face of the omnipotence of the staff, my “independence” from my mother meant that I had no one to whom to turn for help. The power held by the camp staff members meant we had no recourse other than running away, a potentially dangerous and somewhat extreme, choice. The director describes camp staff as supportive agents who assist campers in overcoming challenges, thereby replacing the more familiar parent or familial supports. But what happens when the challenge the child faces is with the camp staff? In this

instance, the lack of support or, conversely, the level of independence felt by the camper, translates into powerlessness.

Obviously, this event is a relatively extreme example of the social interactions between campers and staff, but, as I stated above, I believe this example only makes the greater societal significance easier to notice, rather than dismissing the experience as an irregularity. For example, our conflict with the camp staff escalated to create a great deal of tension, but what if when the staff initially refused to let us call home, my cousin and I had instead quietly gone back to our bunks and stuck it out for the rest of the session? Eventually, we probably would have found a way to try and have more fun, or at least elevate our discomfort, as we would really have had no other choice but to do so. That scenario, however, does not change my interpretation of the issue of independence described above as we still would have been powerless and cut off from any other form of support, unable to assert what we wanted. The independence intended to empower children and offer them the chance to do things on their own can also therefore result in a dramatic imbalance of power, as campers can potentially be left entirely without any adult to advocate for their wishes or individual needs other than those directly involved with the camp program.

Without another adult to advocate for their wishes, children are left entirely outside the dominant power scope, their opinions and desires potentially disregarded in the face of the adult-centric mantra of “I know what’s best for you”. Applying Foucault’s theory of the link between knowledge and power (Hall, 1997), if the adults hold the power in any given situation, their opinions make up what is held to be “true” and it is up to them to choose whether or not to include the child’s opinions in this category. If the adult-driven dominant discourse surrounding camp, as described by the those holding the most powerful positions within the situations, the

directors, is that it is good for kids and that even if they are somewhat uncomfortable, they will learn a great deal and in the end it will be a positive experience, then any complaints a child may have about being at camp can be minimized and disregarded given that, despite what she thinks, being at camp will be “good for her”. Reflecting on the distribution of power at camp, and its impact on campers’ experiences, I found myself thinking back to Foucault’s work regarding marginalized groups such as criminals and those with mental illnesses (Foucault, 1971). To me, his discussion of the isolation of some groups within society by devaluing their perspectives, not including their voices in the dominant discourse and ignoring their expressions of their own experiences sounds similar to what I saw in my narratives. This potential devaluing of children’s voices is compounded by their isolation from other adults who could advocate for a camper’s desires or needs on a more equal footing with the camp staff. This study cannot speak to the more general societal dominant discourse regarding camp, but, because of the closed nature of the camp setting and the fact that campers are generally reliant on the permission of staff members to make contact with non-camp adults, it is the perspective of those adults directly involved with the children that impacts upon their experience the most. This high degree of power held by the camp staff must therefore be treated with a great deal of respect and consideration.

While the degree of independence children experience at camp influences the power the adults involved hold over the campers, that power can in turn influence how children cope with negative emotions experienced at camp such as homesickness. As found in Thurber and Weisz’s (1997) study on homesickness, a child’s perceived power over their situations dictates whether or not he or she copes by trying to change their environment (primary coping) or by changing their own internal state (secondary coping) (Thurber & Weisz, 1997). This study also found that the

less power children feel they have over the situation at camp, the more homesickness they reported. Secondary coping, being able to adjust their own reactions or expectations to establish harmony between their internal state and the situation in which they find themselves, was noted to be utilized successfully by older campers, but was not found to be an effective coping strategy for the younger children involved in the study (Thurber & Weisz, 1997). Further, children attempting to utilize primary coping strategies in situations in which they were relatively powerless to effect change in their external situation were noted to experience an increase in their level of distress (Thurber & Weisz, 1997).

Relating this research back to my experience at camp, at first I attempted to utilize secondary coping strategies by default as I did not attempt to talk to anyone about my homesickness, or change my situation at camp in any other way. Instead, I kept my feelings to myself and simply tried to get along as best I could. When that strategy failed and I encountered my cousin who felt similar to me, however, I attempted to change my situation by asking to call home. After our discussion with the staff members, we felt that they were not going to let us call and I realized that we did not actually have the power to make them do so, which certainly increased my level of distress. By running away, we re-asserted our power over the situation by refusing to accept the response of the staff members and thereby successfully utilized primary coping effectively. According to the findings of Thurber and Weisz (1997), children who report lower levels of homesickness more accurately understand the level of power they hold over their situation and are able to utilize both methods of coping at different times. What complicates this issue for camp staff is that children are essentially powerless over whether or not they stay at camp with their parents ultimately making the final decision regarding their participation. Teaching effective coping strategies and helping children increase their perceptions of control by

emphasizing their control over the homesickness itself, camp staff can decrease the negative emotions experienced by campers struggling to adjust to life at camp (Thurber & Weisz, 1997). Part of this kind of support, to me, rests in acknowledging the presence and normality of homesickness and approaching it in an open and empathetic manner so that children will be comfortable asking for assistance. In my experience at camp, there was no such acknowledgement and my embarrassment over my homesickness was a reoccurring theme throughout the first part of the narrative.

This embarrassment I describe in the autoethnography related to my homesickness is something that warrants deeper exploration. I know I was ashamed to admit I was homesick and worried that others would judge me if I expressed my feelings. While at camp, it never even occurred to me that other campers might be going through the same thing, but now I wonder how many children experience similar emotions during their time at camp. At the time, I felt a lot of my embarrassment was based on coming from a non-traditional family and worrying about people judging me or seeing me as “weird”. I wanted to prove I was “normal” or at least, that I could do anything a “normal” kid could do. Reflecting on this element of the issue of independence, however, I found myself wondering how many children experience homesickness at camp, but are too embarrassed to talk about it? Do sentiments such as those expressed by the directors, that children should be able to be away from their families and that camp is an experience that aids in their development, create a reciprocal negative judgement of children who are not comfortable with being at camp? The research conducted by Thurber and others explores many facets of homesickness, but does not deal with this issue (Thurber, 1995; Thurber & Weisz, 1997; Thurber, 1999; Thurber, 2005).



Obviously, children need to grow up and leave the family home at some point and the inability to handle age-appropriate separation can be a sign of other emotional or developmental problems, but is there also a stigma attached to homesickness that might make children reticent to bring it up with relative strangers in a situation such as camp? Can directors say their staff truly supports and cares for children if their staff is potentially unaware of what the children may be experiencing? The lack of empathetic discussion of homesickness in the interviews with the camp directors seems to indicate they do not see homesickness as a serious problem. If homesickness was mentioned at all, the directors seemed to gloss over it, minimizing its importance and emphasizing that kids “get over it” pretty quickly. Further research into this issue is obviously needed before a definitive declaration can be made regarding the potential stigma of homesickness, but homesickness appears to be a topic that might offer a great deal of insight into our societal expectations of children, their relationships with adults and the value we assign to their emotional experiences.

The director portrays the element of independence as freeing and empowering because children can try new things, increase their competency and develop important life skills. Of course, the flip side of these elements is that by taking away what are portrayed as potentially crippling or limiting support systems, the child is left emotionally vulnerable, bereft of his or her usual coping mechanisms. This element of the social structure of camp can magnify any negative experience or emotional reaction as the child is unable to process or deal with the problem as he or she normally would at home. This removal of familiar support structures could be compounded by the potential withdrawal from the social situations by campers experiencing more depression resulting from their homesickness (Thurber & Malinowski, 1999). The analysis of findings of this study were not able to determine whether campers who are more social

experienced less severe symptoms of homesickness or if more severe homesickness results in children withdrawing. Either way, the relationship between more severe homesickness and isolation is clear. I do not wish to reduce the importance of this kind of growth experience, for I fully recognise it can be an important part of any child's development and that we all must grow up and learn to cope with life on our own at some point. By comparing the two narratives at the centre of this text, however, I have come to recognize the level of development and challenge in camp settings is determined by the staff members involved, which can result in uncomfortable, frightening or even painful experiences for the child. This type of externally driven independence, whereby a child cannot call on his or her support systems without the permission of strangers for a relatively extended period of time, means that these strangers may end up placing the child in a situation for which he or she is not ready.

Additionally, campers may not be comfortable expressing their needs to relative strangers, especially if they know or believe their wishes are in conflict with camp policy. In my autoethnography, I acknowledged that if my cousin had not been with me and I had been alone when I asked to call home and was rebuffed, I probably would have given up and quietly backed down from the confrontation. Had I done so, it would have appeared that I accepted and agreed with the camp's actions, regardless of how I actually felt and the fact that my needs had not been met. Because campers are away from those in whom they would normally confide when upset or uncomfortable, camp programs run the risk of not being in touch with how a camper really is dealing with his or her challenges. Not only might campers not confide in the relative strangers at camp, but it would appear that campers tend to internalize the effects of homesickness and that internalized reactions, such as depression, are only sometimes observable, even to those who knew the child (Thurber, 1995). Independence can therefore be a double edged blade that either

encourages a camper to grow and move beyond her personal limits or leaves her alone and unhappy without an outlet or means of helping herself.

The directors' interviews were focused primarily on outcomes of the camp experience, given that exploring outcomes of the camp experience was the purpose of the interviews. While discussing this topic, though, they made no mention of any potentially negative outcomes relating to the emotional impact of the externally dictated independence experienced at camp. Throughout their interviews, in fact, I noted a distinct lack of real empathetic discussion of the potentially negative outcomes of any elements of the camp program and an effort to portray even the unpleasant experiences as resulting in learning and growth. Whether this tendency to present a wholly positive image of the camp experience was intentionally biased or not, I cannot say. The interview guide, as I stated earlier, did not direct the participants to speak only to the positive elements of their program and yet they did. Perhaps they were trying to present their programs in the most positive manner for the sake of ensuring the study reported positive findings or perhaps they were hesitant to bring up negative elements of the phenomenon with "outsiders" who might not fully understand or who might be judgemental. Whatever their reasons, however, their choice to present only positive outcomes remains and while the directors might be more forthcoming with negative elements if asked directly, I find the fact that they chose not to include them in their interviews significant. Intentions and reasons aside, by choosing not to discuss the potentially negative elements of the camp experience, the directors presented a distinct viewpoint and opinion regarding the phenomenon which I have responded to with this study. Relating this issue back to Foucault's work, if those with power dictate what is held to be true about a phenomenon and a significant group of power-holders describe it as predominantly positive, camp in our society is then held to be a positive experience for children,

even if they may find parts of it unpleasant. In the narrative, I attempted to convey this focus on positive developmentally productive elements. As I discussed earlier in this paper, in my literature review, this focus of the directors' matches what I found in related literature, namely that we as adults tend to focus on the growth and potentially productive facets of children's experiences rather than the more experiential elements.

While I believe camps need to validate and respond empathetically to individual campers' experiences, if they were to drop everything and acquiesce to every camper's every individual wishes, not only would the camp be unable to function, but much of the learning and personal growth children experience at camp would be lost. What is seen in the contrasting of these narratives, therefore, is the need for a middle ground. By offering children an environment in which they must stand on their own, away from familiar support systems, camps create a fairly unique experience during which children can learn about themselves and develop the social skills necessary for their eventual success in the adult world. What camp directors need to keep in mind, however, is that the issue of independence is complex. Despite its potential for developmental stimulation, the emotional impact of this element of the camp experience can be quite negative if not handled sensitively.

The second common issue in the narratives was that of living under the care of adolescent counsellors. In the director's narrative, the relationships between campers and counsellors are portrayed as supportive and friend-like, with the staff members focused on the camper's experiences at camp. There is also a distinct element noted by the director that links the age of the counsellors to the special type of relationship they build with the campers. Seen as something not usually experienced by kids in our society, the director talks about campers enjoying being with someone older who is still somewhat close in age. They look up to staff and see them as

“cool.” I found, in my experience, there is a distinct downside to having young adults or adolescents as caregivers because they are not always mature enough to handle such a role.

While my experience with my counsellor was perhaps exceptionally negative, again, I found it begs the question, what happens when these “older kids” are not cool, or do, in fact, act their age and slip into a moment of self-preoccupation or limited empathetic ability?

The ability to care for children with patience, empathy and appropriate technique has been noted to increase with the age of the caregiver (Margolin, 1991), not a surprising finding given the increased levels of both personal development and capacities as well as experience that come with age. Examining the outcomes of adolescent caregiving in particular, however, several studies have found increased incidences of child abuse and neglect when young children are left in the care of adolescents (Kourany, Martin, & Armstrong, 1979; Margolin & Craft, 1990; Margolin, 1990; Margolin, 1991; Martin & Kourany, 1980; Schumacher & Carlson, 1999). Within these studies, reasons for increased rates of children being abused while under the care of adolescents generally fell under the category of developmental limitations, which rendered the adolescents unable to recognize and accurately respond to their charges’ needs and/or putting the child in jeopardy in order to meet their own needs. I was unable to find research specifically pertaining to rates of child abuse at camp, but when reviewing these studies, I also did not find any specific evidence to indicate that the experience of adolescent caregiving in the camp setting would differ greatly from that in day care or babysitting environments. Given these findings, further research into the issue of adolescent caregivers and abuse specifically in the camp setting is obviously needed to fully understand the potential impact of this facet of the camp program. Reflecting upon these studies, I found myself thinking that if there is a distinct increase in the incidences of behaviour extreme enough to be label “abuse”, what about more borderline

adolescent caregiver behaviour? If the higher levels of abuse were linked to the developmental limitations of adolescent caregivers, I suspect that incidences of less serious behaviour resulting in negative experiences for their charges would be increased as well. Again more research in this area is needed to address these questions. With campers being away from home and having limited contact with their families, the counsellor takes on a very significant role in their lives, and even if he or she does not go to the extremes of the abuse described in the studies mentioned above or even that of my experience, a thoughtless remark or moment of what the adolescent sees as harmless teasing could have a lasting impact on the campers in his or her care.

The close-knit special community created at camp was discussed extensively in the camp director interviews. This emphasis on the community created at camp was, therefore, described in the director's narrative, extolling the special kind of connections made during camp participation. For children who attend camp and are included in these communities year after year, the experience undoubtedly offers a wealth of personal satisfaction, a deep sense of belonging, and a host of other positive benefits. Reflecting on my sense of isolation as described in my autoethnography, however, I found myself wondering what happens to kids who stay at camp, yet do not feel included in these communities? Obviously, after only staying for a couple of days, I cannot say definitively if I would have felt included in the camp community or not, had I stayed, but my narrative describes what it was like to be on the outside of that close-knit group. It was not a pleasant experience, especially when it was coupled with the emotional impact of being away from home and my family. To me, the closer the rest of the group was, the more I seemed to feel alone.

Belonging, especially with older children and young adolescents in the "tween" years, can be a complicated concept. Social structures that dictate inclusion or exclusion, such as group

decrees about who or what is deemed cool or uncool, different rates of development and general personal conflicts can shift, morph, appear and disappear rapidly, leaving the potential for a child to feel included one day and excluded the next (Adler & Adler, 1995). While the directors discussed the benefits and sense of belonging children feel at camp, they overlooked the potential challenges faced by children who do not feel like they belong, or are made to feel as if they do not. Perhaps at other camps they take care to ensure campers feel included by using tactics like home visits prior to camp (as one director we interviewed described) to ensure new campers understand camp traditions and songs or “buddying” new campers with returning campers. No matter what steps are taken, however, children are children and I believe it is naïve to assume that issues such as bullying and teasing would not occur at camp that could potentially counteract any other steps taken by the staff.

The idea of camp being a free place where campers can experiment with their identities and try new things, as described in the director’s narrative, ignores the complexity of belonging, which can limit campers’ exploration. The intensity of social contact with fellow campers and staff, which is maintained steadily for the duration of the session without the opportunity to spend time with anyone outside the camp community, means that campers may feel the need to suppress elements of their individuality in order to “fit in” and avoid being excluded from the very community the adults identified as supporting them in their freedom. Indeed, in order for a community maintain its sense of identity and cohesion, a certain degree of conformity is required of its members often resulting in the marginalization of dissenting members (Glover & Stewart, 2006).

In agreement to my criticism of the concept of camp being “one big happy community”, critical literature exploring the dynamics of community has found a somewhat “darker side” to

this phenomenon. In their introduction to a special edition of *Leisure/Loisir*, Glover and Stewart (2006) point out that in order for a community to create a sense of identity, its members must differentiate themselves from the population as a whole, resulting in some people being included in the community while others are not. I would extrapolate from this principal and suggest that the more close-knit the community, the more excluded those outside the community may feel.

Applying this concept of the exclusionary nature of community to the camp setting, I suppose it could be said that each camp is its own community and only excludes those who have not attended or worked at that particular camp. I wonder then, how it would feel for first time campers who don't yet identify themselves as members of that community or for a camper who attended another camp previously or attends multiple camps in the summer. Can you belong to more than one particular camp community? It seems relatively simple to say our community includes all of our campers, staff and alumni but does saying someone is a member of your community make it so? What if a camper doesn't agree with or is uncomfortable with elements of camp tradition or values and therefore doesn't personally identify him or herself as a member of the community? To me, the idea that anyone associated with the camp is automatically part of their community is over simplistic and ignores the reality of the complex nature of the phenomenon of community.

Another critical view on community suggests that being granted membership within a given community does not necessarily mean having access to all the benefits potentially offered by said membership. Exploring the issue of social capital, Glover (2006) suggests that different members of a community may enjoy different "returns" on their involvement depending on their position within the social network, the position of that network in the broader society and the quality of the relationships the individual shares with his or her fellow members. Referring to



Lin's (2001) work regarding return deficit, Glover points out that the power held by individuals based on their social standing within the community can influence the rewards they receive for their investments in the community. To frame this within the camp setting, if one were to look at a camper who is allowed to hang out with the "cool kids" but is slightly awkward, "geeky" or "uncool", he will have to put more energy into maintaining and strengthening his friendships with the other members of the group in order to receive the same kind of support and acceptance the leader of the group has.

Glover's second point focuses on the power held by the specific group within the broader community or society and illustrates that no matter what the individual's standing within the group may be, the group itself may not possess much power, resulting in what Lin (2001) calls a capital deficit. At camp, this could be seen when a child who is the leader of her particular group of friends does not receive a great deal of return for her efforts as that group is generally seen as outcasts or "losers" within the broader community of the camp. As with the child in the first example, she does not receive equal return for her expenditure within her relationships but in this case, it is the result of her entire group essentially experiencing a deficit of capital; as its leader she should enjoy a large portion of the capital held by the group but if her group does not possess a significant amount of capital, there is nothing for her to receive in the first place.

The final cause of uneven return, according to Glover, is that of low quality relationships within the network. Criticising the tendency to equate a quantity of social ties with a high degree of social capital and positive life outcomes, he points out that we must examine the nature of these relationships and the actual impact of them on the individual's life before we can claim that they are a positive force in his or her life. Returning to the child in the first example, what if instead of simply having to try harder and invest more into his friendships, that child was

actually teased, bullied or used by the group in some other manner? His investments in their group would then be actually causing him harm rather than simply not offering a equal rate of return. Within the shifting social dynamics and children's desire to be included and part of a "cool" group, as discussed above, the danger of children being exploited by their so-called-friends is certainly possible at camp.

I would suggest that the close-knit nature of the camp community might result in children continuing to invest themselves in relationships which are not offering a great deal of return in order to keep themselves from feeling excluded or left out. Exclusion from peer groups has been noted to result in lower levels of self esteem, sense of personal competence and sense of self concept (Harter, 1982; Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000; Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997) as well behaviours such as self harm and/or suicide (Owens et al., 2000). Inclusion in peer groups, however, has been found to result in positive relationships with peers, fewer behavioural problems and better adjustment to challenges at school (Henrich, Kuperminc, Sack, & Sidney, J.B. Leadbeater, B.J., 2000). Once again, upon reflecting on the two extreme examples found in these narratives, the message seems to be one of a double edge to the issue of community.

Another area of similar topics but differing outcomes found in the narratives rests in the social intimacy felt at camp. The director described a family-like atmosphere where campers maintain close contact with staff members suggesting a more "real" experience of social connection as the staff members are unable to separate different parts of their lives from what they share with the campers. An element of the social connection and community building, this facet again stood out for me during the interviews with the directors as something that was definitely not part of my camp experience. For me, the difference between my family life and the values and attitudes at camp were so vast, I don't think I ever would have described it as

“family-like,” and while I acknowledge that my family is particularly unique in our society, I posit that every family is different and that, for most campers, there are elements of this close interaction with staff members that is actually uncomfortable or unfamiliar, at least at first. This level of “different-ness” will be discussed further in the program and the closing reflections sections.

## **6.2 Program**

The second major area of common elements between the two narratives is the specific structures of camp programs. The programming elements found in both narratives highlight issues of participating in activities different from those “at home”, having fun, dealing with challenges and the concept of camp being a “different place”. These elements all contribute to the overall experience of camp and differentiate it from other children’s leisure programming.

The idea that at camp children can participate in different activities than they experience at home was repeated throughout the interviews with the camp directors. Based on these interviews, the second narrative includes this element and describes it in regard to two distinct facets of camp programming that allow campers to participate in new activities: (1) freedom of choice and (2) variety of choice.

Discussing elements of their programs, several of the directors highlighted the various activities they offer at camp, outlining several distinct types of activities such as high ropes courses, sailing or wilderness camping trips, which are not generally readily available to campers in their daily lives. These activities create opportunities for children to try activities in which they have not had the chance to participate previously. For some campers, these opportunities may allow them to try something they have always wanted to do, while for others, it may

introduce them to an area of leisure of which they were previously unaware. Through both required participation in activities such as canoe trips and the opportunity to try different activities during free time, campers may also participate in activities they previously believed they would not enjoy, perhaps resulting in not only finding a new passion, but also increasing their general and personal level of leisure awareness. In so doing, they are further developing and refining their leisure preference within a wider scope of activities. The wide selection of activities also offers campers the opportunity to develop new skills that may contrast or compliment those fostered by their activities at home. For example, a child who participates in primarily sports based activities at home may have the opportunity to participate in arts based programming or another child who chooses to spend a great deal of time on the computer at home might realize he or she can survive a week in the deep woods away from all electronics and other comforts of home. Access to a wider range of leisure activities would presumably lead to children who are more likely to find activities they enjoy and have some skill, which would in turn lead to increased leisure satisfaction through an increase in traits such as positive attitudes towards leisure, personal interest in leisure pursuits and a sense of personal capacity to participate in leisure while also decreasing the individual's leisure boredom (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

In my time at camp, despite the short length of my participation, I experienced a similar range of activities. While I was there, the opportunity to participate in a drama type program was one of the few highlights of my experience and I appreciated the opportunity to choose my own activity, rather than having to participate in already set programming such as I had previously experienced at day camps. Of course, my only experience linked to the idea of a canoe trip, which is an experience unique to the camp setting for many children, was not so positive.

Wilderness camping was not something with which I was familiar and the only contact I had with it at camp involved my counsellor threatening us that we had to pass the swim test if we wanted to participate in the larger program. While I passed the test, her threats did nothing to make me feel encouraged about the trip. Reflecting on what the directors saw as the benefits gained from participating in new experiences, I would say there are a lot of potential benefits, but, as with the various elements of the social structures in the camp program that I discussed above, those working at camps need to recognize the potential emotional impact of participating in new activities. New often equates with frightening or intimidating, especially for children who possess fewer coping skills, and adults, or young adults, involved in programs that place children in unfamiliar situations must recognise the potential anxieties caused by their program if they hope to offer their participants positive experiences.

By offering children not only a range of activities, but also the opportunity to freely choose what they participate in for a large portion of their time at camp, camp programs allow children to try new things and assert their independence and personal preferences. By coupling the wide range of activities with both the social factors of independence and the supportive community, camps encourage campers to move beyond their preconceived ideas of their personal limitations without worrying about failure, judgement or negative consequence. Bonner (1998) describes the parent/child relationship in our society as being one in which parents potentially retain total control over their children. This distribution of power, when theoretically combined with the parental preoccupation with developmental outcomes discussed previously, suggests that today's children may experience a low degree of perceived freedom in their leisure participation. Camp offers parents a way to satisfy their desire for stimulating experiences, while also affording their children more freedom of choice than in other areas of their leisure participation. Shamir (1992)

notes that leisure identities can become meaningful in our construction of self-concepts if they: express and affirm individual talents and capacities; provide social recognition; and affirm out values and interests. By not only providing children with the opportunity to experiment with a wide range of activities, but also with a high degree of freedom and support, thereby allowing them to express their own preferences and perceived areas of talent, summer camps could potentially play a significant role in campers developing healthy leisure identities. This would certainly explain the directors' tendency to extol the developmental benefits of camp activities while also emphasizing that children can choose *between* a wide range of appropriate activities.

In my autoethnography, being able to choose my activity and select something I enjoyed certainly added to my enjoyment of the camp. I wouldn't say that it drastically impacted upon my sense of self or created an increased sense of identity, but the brevity of my experience at that camp would almost certainly have influenced the degree of impact this facet of its program had on me. Despite the short length of time I spent at the camp, my experiences at home, which included a high degree of freedom of choice, could also have reduced the impact of this element of the camp program for me in particular.

The second common area touched upon by many of the directors and also a prominent issue in my autoethnography was that of having fun at camp. The director's narrative emphasized that aside from the goals of learning and growth, camp is ultimately about having fun. What came through in my narrative, however, is that while "fun" can be a component of the camp experience, it is not enough. I acknowledged enjoying some of my experiences at camp, but found they did not overpower the other emotions I was experiencing and overall, I would definitely say that my experience at that camp was not "fun".

Reflecting on this element that is so often emphasized as a primary component of children's programming, I found that several facets of the sense of fun were found in the narratives. The subjectivity of fun is indisputable and I found myself wondering how many of the directors in the interviews would offer to send a camper home if he or she wasn't "having fun" at camp. If they identify fun as their primary goal, how far are they willing to go to meet it? Following on this thought, I found myself thinking about how often we link fun with children's programs and how we use it as both a motivator and disguise to get children to do things we think they will dislike. For example, I cannot count the number of times I have heard adults tell children something like "we'll go to the park after we [insert name of undesirable activity]" or programs declaring that "we make learning fun". After only a brief search, I found papers assessing or discussing the use of "fun" as a sugar coating for educational activities (Barab, Thomas, Dodge, Carteaux, & Tuzun, 2005; Parker & Lepper, 1992) and even one discussing how to implement elements of fun in research involving children (Punch, 2002). While I acknowledge that it can be difficult to motivate children and gain their cooperation in activities they find boring or unpleasant, I struggle with this focus on fun.

Based on my experience at camp, I would say that while fun is important to children, and is perhaps the facet of their experience they are most easily able to evaluate and label, it is not the most important element of a program. Fun as an ultimate outcome, especially in leisure-based programs, appears to me to be an indicator of the other elements of a program; if a child does not feel safe, feels excluded or does not understand the activity, he or she will not "have fun". Having circled back around with this idea, I found myself agreeing with the closing of the director's narrative that if a child doesn't have fun, the camp has failed them in some manner, but I would caution against undue focus on "fun" in and of itself; to create fun experiences,

caregivers/programmers cannot simply play games and be silly, they need to first ensure that their participants' needs are met. While this observation might seem a logical concept that most programmers or facilitators understand, I believe it warrants specific focus and feel that by choosing to explicitly focus on "fun", we run the risk of overlooking other important elements or not conveying our full intentions to staff members working directly with the children.

The third area of camp programming that surfaced in my reflection was that of the inclusion of challenges in children's experiences at camp. The director's narrative outlines the potential for social challenges and conflict, the challenge inherent in learning new activities and the concept of camp being a safe and supportive environment in which children will learn how to deal with these and other challenges. These types of challenges are highlighted as potential learning experiences that move the child outside of his or her comfort zone while staff members support and encourage them. Certainly, the different activities, living environment and general structure of camp programs present children with a variety of different types of challenges depending on the individual child's age, familiarity with camp or similar situations, the activities he or she participates in and a host of other individual factors. The director also speaks about campers learning about themselves and developing problem solving skills that will help them later in life through their experiences of challenges at camp. The concepts of problem solving and skill development in this area are indeed common elements included in discussions centering around child development (Azmitia, 1988; Craig, Kermis, & Digdon, 2001; Harris & Liebert, 1984; Kendall & Fischler, 1984; Meehan, 1984).

In my autoethnography, however, the major challenge I faced at camp was not wanting to be there. This type of conflict, between the camper and staff members, was not discussed in the narrative because it was not mentioned by the directors in the interviews. In the autoethnography,



my cousin and I approached the problem of not wanting to be at camp as we had been raised to deal with all challenges: by attempting to talk about it and explain our wishes, assuming our perspectives would be valued and respected. While the staff members involved did try to talk to us about staying at camp, I felt that they were ignoring our request and changing the subject to focus on us staying rather than discussing what we wanted or how we felt. Their approach made me feel belittled and frustrated and their lack of empathy was actually quite hurtful. We did not understand why the camp staff would not let us call and therefore were unwilling to simply give up. The fact that they chose to lie to us about calling our parents was the final straw that made it impossible for me to stay. Not only were they not being upfront with us but they appeared to have no moral objection to lying to us and keeping us at camp against our will, having us believe it was because “our dad” asked them to, which was well beyond the scope of what I considered acceptable behaviour for a caregiver. I certainly felt I was doing my best to reach a resolution, trying to explain what I wanted to Connor, but was confused, frustrated and hurt by his behaviour.

Reflecting on these two perspectives regarding children dealing with challenges, I found myself wondering about this issue in our society in general. Do we on the one hand expound cooperation and collaborative problem solving between children, yet on the other hand expect them to acquiesce to our wishes when their desires conflict with those of adults? Based on only the examples seen in these two narratives, I would suggest this question is answered in the positive. According to the evidence found in these contrasting perspectives, adults want children to approach challenges with courage and conviction, to do their best to overcome the obstacles they encounter, but when their challenges involve adult agendas or what we want for them, we expect children to back-down and do not feel we owe them an explanation or the opportunity to

reach a mutually agreeable consensus. To refer again to Bonner's (1998) work, in our society, even if not all parents may assert this type of control, they ultimately could and therefore retain a high degree of power over their children. While his work does not specifically extend to those acting in the role of parents, in their absence, I would argue that if children are used to operating under this type of control they may assume other adults are bestowed with that power by parents who resign a child to their care. This statement may seem to extend beyond my research, but again, I feel my findings in this work have suggested the need for further research and discussion.

The final common area of programming that I found in my reflection was the idea that camp is a "different place". Combining elements of programming, the social components mentioned previously and the physical wilderness based settings, this element reflects the overarching idea that camp, as an experience or phenomenon, is a unique entity in our society. What the directors expressed in the interviews is that, as a whole, camp is both a different experience and different place than any other children experience. Specific elements were identified as examples of what contributes to the distinctness of camp such as: living with young adult counsellors as opposed to spending the day with teachers; living in close proximity to nature in somewhat rustic settings; choosing between a variety of unusual activities unavailable at home or at school; and living and playing as members of the larger community for a relatively extended, continuous, period of time. What the directors struggled to express in many of the interviews seemed to be that "camp" as an entity is more than its individual parts; once combined, the separate factors become something more than just a list of components of the programs. While the directors describe this type of difference as a positive element of the camp experience, coping with separation from their family in a novel environment can decrease

children's perception of control and thereby increase the distress they may feel as a result of homesickness (Thurber & Weisz, 1997).

As described in my autoethnography, my experience of camp was that it certainly was very different than my experiences at home. My experiences, however, did not mirror the director's description of a wonderfully different world where children can express themselves, try new things and have fun with each other away from their homes and parents. I suppose it could be argued that the degree of difference between the camp environment and my family environment are atypical in our society, but it still emphasizes the need for camp staff to be empathetic to children's reactions to the "different-ness" of the camp experience. As was discussed above, children can be quite resilient and adaptable, but, given their limited overall lifetime experience and generally decreased ability to process their emotions, different environments are likely to result in stronger reactions with more impact on their overall experience than with adults.

### **6.3 Camp is a different place: people adjusting to the program**

Reflecting on my observations as a whole, I found myself thinking about the concept of adaptation and children's continual process of adjusting to the social world around them as they learn about life and their role within it. Most of my reflections on the differences between my experience and the director's narrative centre on the potentially negative side of the elements of the camp program if, for the individual child, they do not play out in the intended manner. A lot of these differences have to do with the child potentially dealing with a situation drastically different from what he or she is used to. In this manner, most of the potentially negative elements of the camp experience, as I have noted them, would theoretically be reduced over time, as the

child became more and more used to camp and developed the skills he or she needed to handle the situation. Essentially, as the child becomes adapted to the camp environment, he or she will become more successful, and potentially will have more fun.

When faced with new situations we find ourselves having to learn and adapt to succeed or thrive in the new environment but what makes camp potentially different and gives it perhaps more emotional weight than other similar experiences such as attending school or participating in organized sports, is the young age of participants coupled with a very intense level of immersion within the new experience. After a day at school, a young child goes home to his or her familial environment and is therefore able to move between the familiar and unfamiliar, learning as he or she moves between the two arenas; able to fall back on family supports and having breaks between the new experiences. At camp, the experience is different. A child must find his or her way on his or her own, learning as he or she goes. Perhaps this process explains why residential summer camp has established itself as such a distinct element in our society: it is an experience of social adaptation unlike any other we offer our children.

Reflecting on this type of adaptation and Foucault's exploration of social structures and experiences, this aspect of the camp experience appears to be related to his ideas surrounding subjectivity and positioning, as discussed in my earlier review of cultural studies literature. Camp presents children with an entirely new micro-society in which they must struggle to understand their own position, and the positions of those around them, as well as various discourses and perspectives which combine to dictate expected behaviour, power differentials and social identity. At home, they understand who they are relative to those around them, the amounts and types of power they hold and what is expected of them in different social settings,

interactions and relationships. At camp, however, they are thrown headfirst into an entirely different environment and may need some time to adjust to their new situation.

My personal response to this experience was not surprising, given my family background that supported critical thinking and individuality and discouraged conformity to societal expectations just for the sake of fitting in. I was raised to understand that I held a great deal of power over what happened to me and that adults did not possess what I saw to be rather arbitrary power over children. In my family, adults had the final say when it came down to issues of safety or security but I understood the reasons for this power distribution. Denied access to a phone felt to me like an infringement on my rights as an individual and I did not see why an adult should be able to hold that kind of power over me. Within the social structures of my family, I was a subject located in a position which granted me a great deal of power and control over my life and when face with a drastically different position at camp, I felt I had no choice but to take back that power by leaving.

I set out with this paper to explore my reaction to the directors' interviews and at this point, I finally understand it. I understand what really made the biggest difference between my experience at camp and what the directors talked about. Camp really is a different world, as many of the directors specifically noted, and unless a child embraces this new society and his or her position within it, his or her experience of camp will not match the directors' glowing descriptions of having fun just being a kid in the woods.

This issue of positioning and subjectivity in the camp world is salient as it can have a great deal of impact on how we see it as a social phenomenon. If children who routinely participate in camp programs end up enjoying their participation and feel that it was beneficial, we can easily say that camp is a good thing, and that children who do not enjoy it just need to get used to it,

thereby dismissing or devaluing their experience. What might also be lost in this characterization is that children may have to do a great deal of personal adapting to achieve this outcome of enjoying camp. While adaptation is not necessarily a bad thing, I believe that by not acknowledging this element of camp participation, we limit our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. As noted above, when I discussed the issue of independence and dynamics of power involved in children's experiences of camp, the dominant discourse surrounding a phenomenon can influence how we think about that element of our society and we run the risk of limiting the discussion surrounding an experience if we allow the way we describe and define it to become limited to a specific perspective.

The directors' overwhelmingly positive portrayal of camp, therefore, bothered me. Even if they acknowledged camp "isn't for every kid" and teach their staff to be prepared to deal with homesickness or campers not enjoying themselves, this dominant perspective can limit the extent to which children's complaints are heard. As long as the general perception regarding camp is that it is good for children, we undermine the ability of children to effectively protest their participation because we have already decided that even those elements they may find uncomfortable will result in positive outcomes, giving adults justification for minimizing the individual child's reaction and essentially denying their wishes "for their own good". I am in no way meaning to imply that staff members at camps or other children's programs maliciously ignore children's complaints or purposely override their wishes. What I am trying to do is to open the door to questioning how we frame children's experiences within our adult dominated societal perceptions and perhaps point out why we must be cautious and mindful of how we discuss and describe these phenomena to be aware of the potential biases and limitations we are constructing.

## 6.4 Call for future research

This reflection on the two narratives as a whole suggests more research into children's experiences in their leisure participation is needed. Because the scope of this study was limited to only the two narratives and obviously did not actually include the involvement of children, it is impossible to speak definitively about the differences between adult and child perceptions of children's experiences in leisure settings as a whole, but the differences found even in these narratives indicates the potential for substantial variance, which calls for further research in this area. My intention with this study was not to present my readers with a definitive perspective, but rather to open a dialogue regarding children's leisure by suggesting potential areas of conflict or dissonance between children and adults involved.

To me, it appears that these differences centre around the degree to which adults empathize with their child participants and consider the experience as a whole, as it might be experienced as a child, including the potentially negative side of the many positive elements they see in their programs. As mentioned above, many of the positive elements the director describes to the parents in her audience also have potentially negative impacts on children's experiences depending on a variety of personal factors including, but not limited to, the child's age, personality, level of experience with camp, other previous personal experiences, his or her family environment and his or her emotional state at any given time. Given the myriad of influential factors and the potential for negative outcomes, as described in the admittedly somewhat "worst case scenario" described in the autoethnography, this research indicates that it is impossible for an staff members and facilitators to make an assumption about a child's prospective experience in a leisure program and how their actions, as the adult power-holders in most situations will influence that experience.

Future research in this area involving the comparison of children's own narratives and those of adults involved would explore this issue further and test the various theories and concepts I reflected upon above. Research involving children who also had negative experiences at camp, or in other leisure settings, would also add to our understanding of this topic by exploring what contributed to the negative experience(s) and how they thought and/or felt about it as a whole. By further exploring children's experience of leisure we would be able to ascertain the degree of freedom they feel in their leisure lifestyle as well as how they feel about their leisure participation. Openly discussing the relationships between children and adults involved in their leisure, specifically addressing issues of power, choice, and self-determination would also expand on my findings by exploring these issues I have raised in different settings.



## 7.0 Closing thoughts (*Conclusion*)

Overall, I have found the process of this study challenging on both an intellectual and personal level. It has forced me to explore new areas of methodology and epistemology as well as of my past and myself, continually cycling through stages of revelation, reflection and revision. Through composing and exploring these two narratives, I have refined and expanded on my understanding of child-adult relations in our society while also uncovering areas which I am excited to explore further in my future research. I hope that this paper has inspired its readers to consider their own attitudes towards children and reflect on these relationships.

Based on this research I would say that, in our society, adults run the risk of doing a lot of talking *about* children, without spending enough time talking *with* them. I hope that the findings of this study *about* the potential issues involved in these relationships will lead to further research talking *with* children about their experiences.

# Appendices

## Appendix A – Guide used in interviews with camp directors

### Interview Guide

1. What role(s), if any, do you think summer camp plays in youth development?
2. What outcomes do you expect the kids who attend your summer camp to get from the summer camp experience?
  - What sort of **new knowledge** is gained from going to camp?
  - What skills are gained?
  - Does summer camp assist in changing or shaping certain **attitudes**? Is so, what attitudes?
  - Does summer camp assist in **modifying certain behaviours**? Is so, what behaviours?
  - Does going to camp have any role in **altering the condition** of the children who attend?
3. How do the social connections developed at summer camp impact upon the lives of campers?
4. Is there something “Canadian” about summer camp? If so, please explain.
5. What about the intermediate and longer-term impacts of summer camp? How does summer camp influence campers after their experiences have come to an end?
6. Given how many options children now have during the summer, what, if anything, gives traditional summer camps an edge when it comes to the development of youth?

## Appendix B - Quotations taken from interviews

Theme	essences	Director	Quote
One big family	Informal family like community	Ted and Sue	T: What you look like in the morning... S: ...and our kids see us that way, they see us in our pyjamas, they see us in, and all fosters that sense of family, because in a sense that's what it is. We are a big family. We live together, we play together, we eat together. We do everything together.
		Dan	..they're very unaware of any hierarchical structure to any great degree. There's [Dan] and then there's everybody else. Right? They don't, they don't understand really that a section head is the boss of pretty much all these counsellors or that the program director is really in charge of sixty program staff, or whatever. They just, they realize that there's just this group of people that think are really cool. Uh, who they can look up to, and uh, um, so they know, you know, they have no sense of, you know, there's no, there's no really channels that they feel they have to go through. They feel it's as if there's this great mound of people that anywhere in there if they need to talk to somebody they can.
		Tina	Uhm, the relationships with the staff are really special because they look up to those girls as their big sisters and it, often times, it's the first opportunity that big sister has to influence a young person's life.
		Amanda	...if you're talking about a difference between a classroom and a resident camp environment, I would say for sure community's a huge part. Think about how like, family's connect with each other, they're right up in your face. Like, they're there all the time, they know incidents about you that no one else knows and you have a stronger bond with them than anyone else. Same as the camp environment, that you're living and working and, you know, crying and laughing with all these people that you will understand them more because you're more aware of what's going on in their lives.
	Community and sense of belonging	Dan	...Kids who have known each other since they were six...
		Dan	A lot of times a lot of the kids will know one another through their camp experience, they've grown up through camp together...
		Sue	But [the camp's founder]'s philosophy, way back when, was, he, he had, he coined this little expression – I count, I

			<p>belong. And what that means is that every boy's important, and to that end, we actually make a home visit to all our first year boys... And that sets up a relationship of trust, and of caring... And we make notes after about each boy so we can place them with the right group of kids, and we understand them.</p>
		Janis	<p>On the other side, we've been working on the last few years on a lot of things for working as a community. So our children have a community contract that the staff work on every year before the campers come and then the campers sign this community contract and it's a behavioural contract as well as a community contract, in fact to enhance the children into learning things about anti bullying and saying no... and not being a by-stander and standing up for themselves and for their peers and for me, that's the newest thing that's happened at our camp and probably the most exciting in the last five years...</p>
		Amanda	<p>in resident camp, I would say more than anything it's an intensely focused community of people so the role is not necessarily just to be a participant but you're an active member of your community and you have a responsibility to give back to the camp whether it's you know, clearing your table after eating or, making sure if you see a younger that's lost you take care of them. Uhm, the expectation is higher in resident camp as far as contributing.</p>
		Amanda	<p>And my goal really is that we have a strong community, period.</p>
	Frustration and conflict after living together for a period of time	Sue	<p>Tolerance is big because they have to live with other people who aren't like them. And share, and be patient and kind.</p>
		Dan	<p>... you learn that, when things bother you, in a small group environment, trying to do this journey, you can't just let it fester and you need to, it needs to be in the open, it needs to be discussed and it needs, and so, often people will bring a form of tension, you know, this and then it bothered me, what it does for these campers is that it allows them to learn how to verbalize uhm, when they have an issue or with someone. Also, what they learn is that people will verbalize with them when they have an issue. So, you know, I've you learn about yourself, that bugs people when I do that .</p>
		Janis	<p>There's not a counsellor just sitting in the cabin, you know breaking up fights or arguments, you know they have to kind of figure out problems on their own and basic things, you know even like cleaning up the cabin – they have to work it out as a group – they have to do it, the counsellor is there but she's not going to do it for them, so they have to learn to live in a community.</p>
		Tina	<p>... her first year at university, she didn't have the drama of all the other first year university students. She has already</p>

			<p>learned how to live in a community. How do twenty women get along living in residence? Well, if you've had ten years of [camp name] as practice, you're starting way ahead of the game. And so this girl, named [Ella], she just really, really loved first year university and that is the thing that first year university students have a hard time with. It's their first time away from home, first time doing their laundry, first time trying to regulate their own life so that they get enough sleep, they eat well, you know? And when you've spent ten years teaching all our girls exactly that, uhm, how to live in community and take care of yourself, get enough sleep, and do the jobs that you're expected to do, and still have fun at the same time.</p>
	Authenticity of self And therefore relationships	<p>Sue</p> <p>Liz</p> <p>Janis</p>	<p>You're, you're authentic. Your relationships are authentic. Who you are is who you are in camp.</p> <p>...and that feeling of being more yourself and more without the trappings or the comforts or whatever that they might have at home to um, it's more, it's an environment that's more what you need, not so much, you know, the, the fashion things, the makeup, the hair, the, those things. It, at camp it's much more, if I'm comfortable I'm good. (laughs) And that's sort of where it ends. It's not a look-based thing to the same degree.</p> <p>Because I think that the staff that we hire – even if they arrive with even a little bit of make-up on that they lose that during our camp training because they learn that their appearance is not as important as who they are and we try to teach that in their 10 days of staff training and by the time the campers come, even if they are a brand new staff – they've lost that city-ism and they're just themselves and so when the campers arrive – their models or their mentors – are just people and not a magazine ad.</p>
	Strong ties/friendships that last beyond camp.	<p>Liz</p> <p>Ted</p> <p>Janis</p>	<p>Those long term camp friendships are huge and deep, and mean a lot, ... I was talking to another alumni the other day who said, "oh I was just talking to so and so, and she's the godmother of my daughter." You know, those friendships are, um, founded at camp and, and long lasting and countless times, I've had people say, "My best friends are my camp friends," ... I always know I can pick up from where I left off with my camp buddies. They're the ones that I know the best</p> <p>these guys have...life long friendships that go back to the time when they were eight</p> <p>I think they learn to trust people that are of their own age and they learn to trust people who are maybe just a few years older than them and they have these bondings. I mean we have these alumni reunions and they come back and they haven't seen their best friend from camp for 20 years and they see them at it was just like it was yesterday – and they</p>

			<p>still have some of the same traits that they shared and things like that. So it's a long going – on-going, long going relationship. We have people who may have only come to camp for one year and I get letters saying “oh yeah, she was my maid of honour at my wedding” and they see each other all the time.</p> <p>Tina</p> <p>I keep in touch with everybody I went to camp with when I was twelve years old. Well, not really everybody, but there are select people... She was the director before me and, uhm, she gets together with, you know, people, people...and it's amazing how those people keep together. And girls are notoriously bad at that...uhm, growing up friends but camp girls, they have reunions, they get together they, as soon as they have babies, they all you know. It's amazing how those uhm, relationships develop at [camp name] over, and most of those girls are there for ten years. That's a really important subculture in their life that they never neglect somehow.</p>
	Intensity of social experience	<p>Dan</p> <p>... Where I acquired my friends from, and there's really two places. Um, one was camp...I know that, while I've lost touch with a number of people through my camp life that I, you know, I know that any time I would, if I were to pick up my phone and call them it would be like we hadn't been apart for more than a couple of weeks. I mean, the other, the only other time that I can equate to that are the friends in residence at university. You know, because it's such an intense experience living together in that environment and sharing experiences with one another. Sharing the high, sharing the highs and lows of your, your life, day to day, um, you know, and, and I think that's what the residential experience provides</p> <p>Ted</p> <p>It's the residence. You have to live together. 24/7. That stuff. And you play. I mean, camp is a playful place. Right? So you don't have to put on any act. You are just yourself</p> <p>Tina</p> <p>I think that by the time you have them in a residential camp, they're a captive audience and everything is accelerated uhm, by the time Wednesday hits, they're lifelong friends. [laughs]...By the time they've stayed up all night with people talking and looking at sunsets, it is an accelerated relationship that you get far more out of than even if you saw your best friend every day at school for a year, it wouldn't be the same.</p> <p>Amanda</p> <p>I'm finding that the trip portion is the bonding, is the intense bonding of campers. So, regardless if you're having communication problems in your cabin at camp or that happens on the trip, the trip is where that all comes to the surface and you have to deal with it. You're out in the middle of nowhere, you have no options but to get through with the support of and your staff and whoever else is on the trip.</p>	

Trying new things	New experiences	Dan	The canoe trip experience, we refer to as the crown jewel in our program. Everybody does it. There's no option in or opting out of canoe tripping. It's something that we do.
		Sue	the ability to go into a new situation that they've never tried before. Because they've done it at camp, they've been exposed to it, they've mastered that ability to take a risk
		Janis	Most of our children come from the you know, dinners made – dad has to go off to a meeting and mom's not home yet and everybody is sitting in front of the tv – and so sometimes that's more of a culture shock than putting them in the lake. And its very sad... how to have conversations at the table because some of them don't know even how to have a conversation at the table. And so I think that's a way bigger culture shock than putting them in a canoe.... And you know teaching them that they have to ask for something – they can't get up and reach for it. And you know, they have to wait until the table gets their food before they can start ... lots of these kids just don't have the opportunity to
		Janis	but you have the occasional camper who has never been to a lake – and many who have never been in canoes or kayaks – or things
		Tina	so if you're sitting around with your friend at lunch, there wouldn't be the a- it doesn't foster the same kind of thoughtfulness, the same kind of quietness, living in the moment, but if you wake your best friend up at uh, four o'clock in the morning and go down and look at sunset on the beach, and then you're both sitting quietly there for an hour, until the sun comes up and the breakfast bell goes. That opportunity for, for, for stillness, just living in the moment, not having to be somewhere else, do something else, or- you don't get those valuable moments out of your busy normal day.
	Different activities	Ted	They swim, they ride, they sail, they canoe,
		Sue	crafts and our pottery and our woodworking and our lapidary and our programs that are considered more feminine. You get the boys who are the stars in the basketball court who also like to do stained glass.
		Liz	But at camp, when they can come, and it's single gender, there's things that they can do that they would not do in a, um, um, you know in a co-ed situation. Something as single as, or as simple as skinny dipping. They'll do that, in, maybe, some kids, you know, some kids...but others will give it a try, whereas in a co-ed situation, you'd have to make arrangements so that, so that they could do. And to me, there's nothing wrong with skinny dipping
		Janis	we're a traditional camp so we have all the you know – wind surfing, sailing, canoeing, kayaking, climbing... arts and crafts?

	Take risks in safe environment	Liz	'I would never do that in the city and you know, I'm a different person at, at camp' [referring to a camper's perspective on her willingness to try a new activity at camp].
		Janis	And if they see that their counsellor is struggling in a second language and attempting to do it, it allows them to do it. And I think language is such a little part of what this allows our children to do because it takes them out of their comfort zone and allows them to try new things. Whether its climbing or kayaking or whatever
		Tina	A safe, a safe haven where you're free to be a fuck-up if you want. Free to be uhm, stellar, free to be whatever... Safety and freedom. A safe-haven to experiment with, with yourself.
Learning and growing	Perseverance	Liz	And the kids see themselves just canoeing or swimming or sailing or doing arts and crafts or whatever, whereas I see them problem solving, and, and, um, learning to get along and being uncomfortable with um... or, or, having to try and do a landing in canoeing over and over and over again and persevering.
		Janis	I have a girl who comes from [city in Quebec] ... And came to camp for many many years and when – I always thought she didn't speak any English. And when she was 14 she got off the bus and said "[Janis], how are you?" and I said "[Celine], I'm fine and You?" and then I said "wait a second...
		Amanda	...individually, you know, you can look back and say 'wow' I had no idea that I could paddle for five hours and then portage through this mud so- craziness with my cabin. But it's, you know, it's something that I think is they turning point of a lot of kid's experiences, is to really conquer some of that wilderness, to just get out there.
	Cope with adversity (character building/learning from challenges)	Sue	...these days, parents don't ever want their kids to be unhappy. They want their kids to have this perfect little life where they never fail, they never have adversity, everything just goes tickety-boom. Well, at camp, you go on a canoe trip and it's pouring rain and the counsellor forgot the, the, pack with all the whatever in it, and you're living in a little tent, and the showers, that someone used all the hot water. And you have tiny little bits of adversity. Which, you know, in the old days, you wouldn't even consider adversity, but, and so that the kids learn that, no, everything's not perfect. Yes, I (had to wait) my turn. No, I didn't succeed at that. And so it gives them small doses of reality that build their character. And we do, you know, we don't make things easy for them.
		Tina	And the challenges they make, they get, the experiences they get from the mistakes and, are far better than the ones



			they get from their successes. Like, if that girl had stopped and looked at what she learned from capsizing her canoe, she would have learned more by capsizing it than she did by getting there successfully.
	Soft skills (social skills, problem solving, caring for others)	<p>Liz</p> <p>Ted</p> <p>Janis</p> <p>Amanda</p>	<p>I think camp, very much, is a vehicle for learning life skills...I emphasize the soft skills more... what I consider the more important stuff, being a decent human being, stuff.</p> <p>A kind, sensitive, you know, caring side that isn't always promoted outside in the rest of the world, you know, where you need to have a tough, you know, take care of yourself attitude. Whereas in a camp, even though it's only three months long, it's intense and it gives the boys, the young men a chance to uh, to show those skills and to learn from each other.</p> <p>On the other side [referring to soft, as opposed to hard skills] we've been working on the last few years on a lot of things for working as a community... to enhance the children into learning things about anti bullying and saying no...and and not being a by-stander and standing up for themselves and for their peers ...and to really speak out when they see something that's not right and not to be afraid and we're just teaching our staff as well to teach the girls that its okay to – to have the confidence and to have the confidence in the staff that they're not going to say anything bad because they said something that's not right.</p> <p>Soft skills to me is, is interpersonal skills and making sure that you use communication skills and that you have awareness of other people in your group so, you know, understanding of different cultures.</p>
	Hard skills	<p>Ted</p> <p>Dan</p> <p>Janis</p> <p>Janis</p>	<p>They swim, they ride, they sail, they canoe, and they're developing, the counsellors have to have their instructor levels to teach sailing, or swimming, or canoeing, or riding, or, those activities. So they actually leave with levels. They come home with their orca levels, A, B, C.</p> <p>... because we are a skill development camp.</p> <p>Okay well hard skills – we're a traditional camp so we have all the you know – wind surfing, sailing, canoeing, kayaking, climbing. We're a big water based camp and we try to have the kids work on those hard skills so that they can be staff members and come back.</p> <p>... And they come out with, just a lot of – just basic stuff. Just like even to be able to pack their suit case or not put their wet bathing suit their bed...just little things that little kids are – that parents are constantly having to do for them. And that's what the parents say. They come back and say "oh yeah, she can brush her hair".</p>

		Amanda	The big thing at [camp name], I would say is, skill mastery, for sure. I mean, we want to make sure that they feel confident and confident in trying new things.
	Ecological values	Liz	...it gives kids an appreciation of nature and even just simple things that, that uh, they might not learn in the city in terms of yeah, there's insects here and there's spiders here but those are good things, and why are they good things and why is it important to not squish them, and, you know, it was their home first and, but they need to be here, and if they weren't here, what would that mean, and, you know, trying to... Like, sure, if you squish the mosquito that means it's not going to bite you and whatever... but at the same time it affects the life, the life cycle and how and why and all that. And also with, um, with pollution, that, you know, sometimes people come to camp and they want to wash in the lake and (we don't) wash in the lake, and why don't we.
		Dan	...(on) our canoe trip. People are often affected by, you know, they come back and they realize, I mean we're creating our little environmentalist movement within the camping movement, right? Because they go out and they see these clear cuts where...we do canoe trips in Quebec where, uh, two years from now the river they travel isn't going to exist because they're flooding it for a hydroelectric project. Well, why does, why do they need a hydroelectric project? They need a hydroelectric project because uh, you know, I, quite literally, I'm not turning the lights off in my house at night, sort of thing, and they'll all, you know, they realize the cause and effect of how we as a society are living our lives against what impact we're having on nature.
		Janis	We're working more now on environmental studies... scientific experiments – a lot of them being environmentally oriented and to get their hands dirty and to not be afraid to try science and math and to mix it with the environment. And that's a big program we started 3 years ago and they like it and we're looking at doing some environmental studies and doing more things with recycling and you know – water reduction and things like that and I think that at camp, its not only what we're expected to do but its what we should do. And we should be the leaders in it so that the campers know all about global warming and things likes that.
Having fun getting dirty in the woods	Coexistence with/proximity to nature	Liz	I mean, they're used to drywall and (broadloom) and you stick them out in a, in a tent, and some of them feel pretty vulnerable. (You still hear the) chipmunk drop on the roof... they think it's a monster.
		Sue	So when they wake up in the morning they hear the birds.
		Sue	And boys do go into the woods and they find, they may

			<p>muck about and, you know, follow a squirrel or they may go up to (camp lookout).</p> <p>Dan ... what we say to them is, you know, because every family in the back of their minds has a picture of what summer camp is. So when we say, we're the close your eyes think of summer camp kind of place, they immediately get this picture of the woods, the trees, the lake, the cabins</p> <p>Tina ... wake your best friend up at uh, four o'clock in the morning and go down and look at sunset on the beach, and then you're both sitting quietly there for an hour, until the sun comes up and the breakfast bell goes. That opportunity for, for, for stillness...</p> <p>Amanda ... you appreciate nature and for some kids who really hate trip, to get through something like a rain storm on trip... now they have something to be proud of.</p>
	Rustic camp settings	<p>Ted We're rustic. There's no electricity in the cabins or temp. The boys of the ages of eleven and older live under canvas on our wooden platforms. Five boys and a counsellor in each tent. And our counsellors live in the cabins and tents with the kids.</p> <p>Ted you have to have a flashlight in the tent and you have to go out to the outhouse... it's a more rustic experience.</p> <p>Liz A [camp structure] is basically a cross between a cabin and a tent. It's a wooden floor, a wooden roof with shingles, two wooden side walls... so, two things for me are benefits of this. One is the feeling of the security and it can be quite warm if you want it to be... but at the same time, if it's a beautiful day they can put the fabric up. The screen is still there, they don't get the bugs, they get the breeze and they get the feeling of a tent</p> <p>Janis ... and I think we pretty much are what they're looking for because we're so rustic. Our girls sleep in groups of four, either in a tent or in a cabin or like a little chalet, but they don't have electricity. There's no running water, there's no electricity. But yet we still have the conveniences of 2007. We have hot showers, we have running water in the bathrooms and things but they still have to read by flashlight, there's bugs. They're not in the wilderness as much as they think but they feel that it's in the wilderness and that's the camp experience and they can have a little campfire, and cook-outs and go on a little over night</p>	
	Divisions and inclusion of different genders is deliberate	<p>Liz Some people in a co-ed situation will feel comfortable, um, trying new skills... But, I don't think there's a lot of people that way, particularly in the teenage years, and I think when you take away the opposite sex, you take away some of the, the fears. You take away some of the, um, you know, oh like, it's just the feeling embarrassed.</p> <p>Ted and T: The gender, well, again the boys do behave differently</p>	

		Sue	<p>without the girls around. Especially the adolescents and the, and the, uh, and the teenagers. And the, even the young, 18, 19, 20-year olds...</p> <p>S: Yeah. Doesn't matter. And there's, and they don't care how they look, they don't care how they dress, they don't care what their hair looks like.</p>
		Dan	<p>And we're deliberate in how we, how we function as a co-ed, uh, a co-educational environment as well... a very natural social interaction between the male and female... our activities are instructed single sex, so we're a hybrid... we also find the learning curve in a single sex environment is, very much allows us that open, you know, that safety net, so to speak, uh, um, in the, in the activities, because we are a skill development camp... we don't do dances... forced social situations where kids are thrown into the realm of the opposite sex and they have to interact... we create environments where we're playing games and during our free time... boys and girls can come together and play there... there are special days, we integrate the teams, uh, you know, so that the boys and girls make a team, and every member is treated equally.</p>
		Janis	<p>...but she can't be strong enough because its gotta be a boys sport. But at our camp its just a sport... I think that gives our girls the advantage of trying things without gender prejudice or whatever... And I just think that its real good because they don't have to dress up like that because there's no one to impress, they don't have impress anyone with their sexuality or who they are – as a girl or as a woman they just have to be themselves.</p>
		Tina	<p>It's a safe haven, where there are no boys. There's no competition from boys there's no, uhm trying to put on make-up for boys. There's no, uhm, you know, 'he said, she said' because there's no 'he' [laughs]. And, lots of times, men ruin female relationships just by being there... Oh definitely, definitely. And when you don't have a male in the room, uhm, the dominant female will maybe take the role but too many times, if there's even a man in room, whether he's married or not, or whether he has expertise, they'll sit back and let the man take control. It's just, I don't know why people do that, but when there's no men on camp property, then uhm, young girls are more likely to, to take the role of the leader... When they go back to, uh, a co-ed experience, they will be more likely to take the lead away from, uhm, a man. And, and they feel afterwards, some of them don't some of them... they get the idea that they're uhm, what they have to say is maybe of value, whether they're male or female?</p>
	Playful place	Liz	<p>...it's recess all day long.</p>
		Ted	<p>And you play. I mean, camp is a playful place.</p>

		Tina	I think in our brochure it says uhm 'making friends, having fun'. Uhm, experiencing camp for the first time in a positive way so that they want to come back for the next twenty years.
	Independence	Liz	...so many kids are so busy, they're off at you know, dance, or sports or language or wherever they are. So the whole pile of kids out playing and being independent and doing their own thing just doesn't happen as much. So, and then with stranger danger and the stuff I was talking about before, parents wanting to pave everything ribbon smooth for them, they, um, kids are used to being looked after all the time. And catered to and, you can't walk from here to there by yourself because you might get kidnapped, or whatever the fear is. At camp...they go independently as a camper group. Um, not with a counsellor... the feeling, I mean you can just see them, (sticking) out their chests, and strutting along like, "I'm doing this all by myself and I don't have some adult hanging over me," and you know, they have this feeling like I'm doing it all by myself and nobody knows where I am.
		Sue	But we, and the other thing that we give, give the boys, is a huge amount of freedom. We do not know where they are, each boy, every second of every day. And boys do go into the woods and they find, they may muck about and, you know, follow a squirrel or they may go up to (lookout) and, and we know when the bell rings at lunch, and at supper, that they're going to come back, and sometimes, you know, they're a little bit late and they've been off doing something
		Janis	There's not a counsellor just sitting in the cabin, you know breaking up fights or arguments, you know they have to kind of figure out problems on their own and basic things, you know even like cleaning up the cabin – they have to work it out as a group – they have to do it, the counsellor is there but she's not going to do it for them... They have to learn to give and take – but in today's society, the parents are taking that all away. If Suzy have a fight at school, mum goes to school and takes care of the fight. Well that's not how it works at our organization. We don't have access to cell phones, they don't have access to call mom and dad every five minutes to alleviate their problems. They have to work them out. And if they cant work them out, then we're going to help them but we give them the tools to try and work it out and they think that's what camp is doing – especially camps that don't have those accesses to cell phones and phoning home all the time. Children really need to learn how to be independent. I think we're bringing up a generation of children who can't perform without their parents right by their side and I think its unfortunate so I really think camp is a leader in taking that role
		Tina	... that's a huge gift to a person, that they, they're comfortable with themselves without their entourage, without their mother. Cause at that age it's about their

			<p>mother... That's what's huge with girls and, that they can stand on their own, without their clique. And that they have power on their own....</p> <p>Tina We've developed this new deal at [camp name], where uhm, if you're over twelve years old, uhm, you get, you design your own program. They go around and uhm it's like a camp fair with all our fifteen programmers and you have a little passport and you book times with all the trainers so that a twelve year old designs her own program, picks exactly what she wants.</p> <p>Tina I hope they learn more about themselves. That they can do it. That they can be away from home and succeed and they can be independent. Fostering independence</p>
	Support	<p>Dan So, what we're seeing in camping now is the messaging changing, realizing that I mean, yes, we have a warm, supportive environment but within that warm supportive environment, what that fosters is a wonderful learning environment.</p> <p>Janis ... because they are in an environment where people are making mistakes and its okay. And they just get some confidence that allows the to you know – all you need is a little bit of confidence and somebody to tell you that its okay and you're doing well</p> <p>Tina Safety and freedom. A safe-haven to experiment with, with yourself.</p> <p>Amanda In a successful, supportive environment kids learn that they can, they can push themselves and say 'no I can do it. I don't need mom to do that, I can do it'.</p>	
	Comfort and authenticity/ be their "real selves"	<p>Liz it's an environment that's more what you need, not so much, you know, the, the fashion things, the makeup, the hair, the, those things. It, at camp it's much more, if I'm comfortable I'm good. (laughs) And that's sort of where it ends. It's not a look-based thing to the same degree.</p> <p>Janis it's the only time that they can be themselves. And that is so sad...But it's a reality. And I don't think that its – its, its these girls who dress like this all year long, but I think its awesome that at least they have a time that maybe their self esteem will go up high enough that maybe a little bit of that make up will come off and they might see that they don't have to dress up like someone they see in a magazine and they can be just a little bit more of themselves and not act older</p>	
	Difference acceptance of behaviours	<p>Dan to see a 19 or a 20-year old guy at the end of the summer, having to leave, uh, this other guy from Germany who he's lived with for the summer and be in, in tears about it. You know, a tough, big, hockey player guy...</p>	

		Dan	[relating feedback from a parent] “I was sitting on the couch, watching the hockey game, whatever. And he came in the room and he sat down on the couch and he snuggled in with me, and I put my arm around him.” And [he] said, “I don’t remember the last time that me and my son had that kind of, like, tender moment. And, you know, and, and, he goes, it, the only thing I can attribute it to is the fact that he had, um, male role models at camp that weren’t afraid to express their feelings about other male people in the environment. They nurtured, they, they showed him nurturing.”
		Sue	...crafts and our pottery and our woodworking and our lapidary and our programs that are considered more feminine. You get the boys who are the stars in the basketball court who also like to do stained glass. And there’s no sense that there’s anything (wrong).
		Janis	We have a 45 foot free standing climbing wall and our girls climb up there like monkeys with no problem what so ever and I don’t think its just because they are our campers. And when our school groups come the girls sit on the log and look up and will not go up...and they will not go up because there is a boy probably looking right at them or is someone looking at her behind or someone might be judging her on whether she is strong enough – but she can’t be strong enough because its gotta be a boys sport. But at our camp its just a sport.
Camp as different world	Not real world, kids are different at camp	Dan	...when they get into this world, uh, which is completely different world from what they’re in. So yeah, we’re not the real world where.. because their real world is pavement and, uh, you know, brick and mortar...so we’re taking them out of that environment, putting them into, um, a place that can, because, I mean...it’s very Zen-like in a lot of ways.
		Liz	She’s been at camp now for about six years. She’s like night and day in the city. You know. Get her up to camp, she’s on the stage flailing around, like a, you know, it’s just like she doesn’t have a care in the world. And that’s not the person you see in the city with the other pressures of, you know, her peers, and school
	Camp as its own entity exists	Dan	what we offer is a very traditional, close your eyes think of summer camp kind of location.
		Liz	you can tell when you’re talking to a person, a parent, who has been to camp, because they really do, quote, get it.
		Tina	it’s practically like a different country. It’s like you’re going to a different country, you’re going to a different setting, a different environment. Uh, it’s so removed from your home experience
		Amanda	I mean, it’s something that, uhm you know, I felt as a

		camper. I remember counting down the days to go back to this magical place.
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\*The names of all directors have been changed to protect confidentiality.



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