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Influences of Resident Camp Experiences on Career Choice

A Case Study of Female Alumnae

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Abstract

Few studies have explored the long-term impacts of camp experiences on career choice, although there is a need to better understand how camp experiences may influence this decision to guide staff recruitment and retention efforts. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of camp experiences on future career paths for women. Twenty-two camp alumnae who attended an all-girls camp completed a retrospective online survey. Salient themes related to career impacts included human service career interest, outdoor career interest, leadership and interpersonal skill development, and social-emotional skill development. Considerations for future research include a national study of a more representative sample of camp alumni to shed greater light on occupational choice and career path for camp alumni.

Keywords: *career choice, camp experiences, gender, outcomes, workforce development, youth development*

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The paths people navigate as they move through adolescence and emerging adulthood to their eventual career or careers vary. Recognizing life experiences that influence career choice can be important for understanding the role of youth development experiences in shaping future success. Childhood provides a window into one's future and understanding success and failure in adulthood begins by examining early life experiences (Johnson & Kossykh, 2008; Terzian, Moore, & Constance, 2014).

Most research into the developmental outcomes of camp experiences have examined short-term youth or staff outcomes, with a small but increasing number of studies examining long-term impacts on camp alumni (Brandt & Arnold, 2006; DeGraaf & Glover, 2003; Duerden et al., 2014; Garst, Franz, Baughman, Smith, & Peters, 2009). The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of camp experiences on future career paths for women. Twenty-two women who attended a residential camp during their youth completed an online short-answer survey designed to examine the long-term impacts and more specifically career choices of camp participants. Using a retrospective case study analysis, the role of camp experiences in shaping career choice among female camp alumnae was examined.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first section describes the theoretical framework that informed this study. The second section examines the developmental outcomes of camp experiences. The third section examines the influence of gender on career development. The final section discusses prior research on how camp experiences might influence future career choices.

Theoretical Framework

This study was framed within a positive youth development (PYD) theoretical approach (Lerner et al., 2013), which acknowledges that all youth have strengths and will develop in positive ways when their strengths and their contexts (often called "developmental assets") are aligned with appropriate supports and opportunities within their contexts (Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Semsal, 2006). Researchers have identified key features of PYD settings that are necessary in order for appropriate development to occur, including: safety, supportive relationships with caring adults, skill-building activities, and youth involvement (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

PYD has often been used as a theoretical foundation for research on the camp experience (Arnold, Bordeau, & Nagele, 2005; Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Garst et al., 2009; Garst, Browne, & Bialeschki, 2011; Garst & Ozier, 2015; Ferrari & McNeely, 2007; Gillard, Watts, & Witt, 2009; Henderson, Bialeschki, Thurber, Schueler-Whitaker, Marsh, 2007; Sibthorp, Bialeschki,

Morgan, & Browne, 2013.). Situating this study within a PYD approach is consistent with the literature that suggests that camp experiences provide many of the supports and opportunities necessary for positive youth development (Garst et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2007). In this study, camp experiences, particularly multi-week residential camp experiences, were viewed to be rich opportunities for youth-adult interaction and skill building.

Camp and Positive Youth Outcomes

Summer camp is a common childhood experience for many youth. More than 11 million youth attend camp annually (American Camp Association, 2014), and a broad body of research supports the role of camp experiences in promoting positive youth development (Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Garst et al., 2011). Positive outcomes include (but are not limited to): social-emotional developmental outcomes (Bialeschki et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber, Schuler, Scanlin, & Henderson, 2007), personal transformation (Garst et al., 2009), learning and academic outcomes (Ozier, 2014; Garst & Ozier, 2015) and health and physical activity outcomes (Beets, Weaver, Beighle, Webster, & Pate, 2013; Hickerson & Henderson, 2012; Ventura, Anzman-Frasca, & Garst, 2014; Ventura & Garst, 2013).

Girls-only camps are common. Seventeen percent of the American Camp Association's approximately 2,400 member camps provide girls-only camp experiences (American Camp Association, 2014). Still, very little research has explored the outcomes or impacts of all-girls camps (Girl Scouts of the USA, 2012; Schmalz, Kerstetter, & Kleiber, 2011). Because camp experiences often include an outdoor/adventure education component, the literature associated with the long-term impacts of outdoor/adventure programs provides additional evidence of the potential influence of camp experiences on girls. Potential outcomes for girls who participate in camps that include outdoor/adventure education include: increased confidence in physical activities, feelings of physical strength, confidence, self-esteem, perseverance, resiliency, positive gender identity development, resistance to gender role stereotypes, courage, and connection with other girls (Whittington & Budbill, 2013; Whittington & Mack, 2010). One study (Whittington, 2011) found that women, who participated in an extensive outdoor/adventure education program as girls, learned a range of skills including technical outdoor skills, communication and teamwork, leadership, perseverance, environmental stewardship and improved family dynamics.

Additional evidence of the role of camp experiences in promoting positive outcomes in girls is suggested by national outcomes studies conducted by Girl Scouts of the USA. Although not specifically camp-focused, these studies of all-girl programs included camp and other outdoor-based experiences. In a 2012 study of alumnae outcomes, Girl Scout alumnae displayed positive life outcomes to a greater degree than women who were not Girl Scouts members

(Girl Scouts of the USA, 2012), including outcomes in the areas of sense of self, community service, civic engagement, education, and income. These results were found for alumnae across age groups/generations, social class, race, and regardless of engagement in other extracurricular activities.

Career Development, Gender, and Class

Career influences begin at a young age and this influence has a developmental basis. As Johnson and Kosykh (2008) explained, “cognitive and social abilities demonstrated in childhood are important for later life outcomes for all groups of individuals” (p. v). Not only do childhood experiences influence career choice (Johnson & Kosykh, 2008; Paris & Frank, 1983), but women’s career choices are further influenced by *occupational segregation* (i.e., the distribution of people based on demographic characteristics such as gender across and within occupations and jobs). Johnson and Kosykh (2008) examined the influence of occupational segregation on women’s career choices and noted that women tended to work predominantly in stereotypical “female” occupations such as the arts, humanities, and social sciences. In fact, women tend to major in fields that lead to jobs that are not rewarded with higher incomes (Bobbit-Zeher, 2007). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010b), the top five occupations of employed women in the United States include secretaries and administrative assistants, registered nurses, elementary and middle school teachers, cashiers, and retail salespersons.

Skelton, Francis, and Valkanova (2007) reviewed the psychological literature related to the gender gap in educational attainment and wages and found that such gaps were either socially constructed or biologically determined. They noted significantly more evidence pointing to the role of social factors rather than biological factors in accounting for the gender gap, with children actively constructing their gender identity and adopting different behaviors to express them. The researchers also proposed that, with regard to educational attainment, the theory of socially constructed gender identities suggests that children construct gender roles as opposites; what is appropriate and meaningful for girls is not considered to be appropriate for boys. Furthermore, Skelton et al. (2007) noted that gender roles and behaviors are modified over time and might be influenced by stereotypes associated with socioeconomic status and ethnicity. In this way, girls’ perceptions of their career choices may be limited based on these perceived gender roles.

Although gender roles may constrain career choices, gender role constraints may be mitigated by class (Thompson & Subich, 2011). In fact, researchers have noted how occupational choice and achievement are often bound by issues of gender, class, and race. Kerka (1998), in a summary of issues related to career development theories, noted that prevailing career development theories were based on white males from middle to upper class backgrounds, and so their applicability to women as well as persons of color was questionable. According

to Mickelson (2003), women develop beliefs about their academic and occupational achievement according to both their gender and their social class status.

Career Development and the Camp Experience

With little research on the influence of camp experiences on career development from the perspective of former campers, literature related to the career development influences of camp employment was reviewed. Research suggests that camp experiences influence career direction (Garst et al., 2009; Brandt & Arnold, 2006; DeGraaf & Glover, 2003; Ferrari & McNeely, 2007; Girl Scouts of the USA, 2012). Brandt and Arnold (2006) surveyed 83 camp alumni to measure the impact of the camp counselor experience and found that camp employment was associated with long-term, positive impacts on self-confidence and transferable skills such as enhanced leadership, positive role modeling behaviors, and encouraging and supporting others. The researchers also found that camp experiences indirectly influenced the type of job or work setting that participants wanted in their future. Conversely, the authors also found that employment as a camp counselor did not have a strong influence on career choices associated with youth development. When alumni younger than 24 years old were compared with alumni 24 years old or older, the older alumni identified a greater number of skills than younger alumni. The researchers proposed that these differences might be explained by life stage; older alumni had career and family responsibilities that seemed to make particular life skills increasingly important. Brandt and Arnold (2006) also found that camp experiences had both indirect and direct impacts on staff members' career decisions. Indirect impacts included the type of job or work setting they would like in their future and direct impacts included life skill development.

The influence of camp experiences on the career plans of camp staff have also been examined through the lens of transformative learning theory (O'Sullivan, 2002). Transformative learning has been described as "a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better justified" (Cranton, 2006, p. vi). Transformative learning theory posits that the process of transformation includes the dimensions of psychological, convictional, and behavioral change (Clark, 1993). Garst et al. (2009) examined camp experiences as transformational in the lives of camp staff aged 18 to 24. Seventy-two percent of study participants indicated that as a result of camp, they were more aware of what they want to do for a career. In addition, 52% said they were more likely to change their career plans due to their camp experience. For example, some focus group participants mentioned a switch from a career path centered on personal financial gains to one focused on positive youth development, which contradicted the findings noted earlier by Brandt and Arnold (2006). Furthermore, some participants stated that they changed occupational goals or increased school and civic involvement based on their camp leadership experience.

Some research on the impact of camp experiences suggests the role of camp in shaping 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003)—including teamwork, social skills, and initiative—that are valuable to employers. Ferrari and McNeely (2007) surveyed 205 camp counselors and found that camp involvement helped them develop 21st century skills. However, the age of their sample (15 to 16 years old) limited participants' ability to connect current skill acquisition with how those skills might be beneficial for their future careers. Similarly, Duerden et al. (2014) studied the workforce development outcomes of the camp experience based on focus groups with 21 camp alumni who had worked in a variety of camp settings. Study participants attributed a number of positive impacts to camp employment, including gains in skills related to interpersonal interactions, communication, problem solving, and leadership. The authors also noted similarities between camp employment outcomes and 21st century workplace skills.

Retrospective approaches have been valuable in studies of the long-term impacts of camp experiences. For example, DeGraaf and Glover (2003) conducted a retrospective analysis 5 to 15 years after the camp experience to examine the influence of the camp experience on camp alumni. They conducted focus groups with 29 camp alumni (15 men and 14 women) aged 24 to 70. They found that as respondents distanced themselves from the camp experience, they continued to view camp positively and recognized the positive effects that their camp experience had on their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, they noted that older alumni were more likely to mention camp's connection to future employment; however, no respondent indicated that they had chosen to pursue a career in recreation or organized camping.

Considering the current literature, the goal of this study was to build on what was known about camp experiences for alumni and how camp experiences influence future career choices. More specifically, this study examines the role camp plays in shaping the career choices of female former campers.

Methods

Program Description

This study examined camp experiences of alumnae who attended a 92-year-old resident camp located on 200 acres in Southwest Virginia. This camp was chosen for several reasons; it provides a traditional camp program that includes a wide range of activities and an emphasis on small group living in the out-of-doors. Historically, the camp and its program are tied to similar camps along the east coast started in the same time period (1915–1925) with staff from older camps often taking traditions to their new camps. This shared history and traditions makes the camp representative of traditional girls' camps (Paris, 2008). Lastly, geographic proximity to the researchers as well as the

camp's interest in learning more about its long-term impacts made it an ideal camp for the study.

Designed for girls aged 6 to 16, the camp's sessions range from two to seven weeks with a one-week introduction to camp session for new campers. The relatively small capacity of 100 campers allows the camp to offer a flexible daily schedule with a high level of camper choice of activities ranging from arts and crafts to adventure programs. The camp setting is intentionally rustic, with campers living in small, non-air conditioned cabins with a separate bath house. Camp program areas infringe upon the natural environment as little as possible while maintaining high safety standards. The camp's philosophy (i.e., the targeted outcomes) is to provide a social and physical environment that promotes, develops, and enhances the emotional, social, and spiritual potential of each camper; and assist them in the discovery and enjoyment of themselves and the richness of life as they grow and develop (Camp Carysbrook, 2015).

Many young women return to become staff during their college years and multiple generations of campers within one family are common. Campers tend to be from high socio-economic backgrounds, are predominately white, and represent a wide geographic area including international campers.

Participants and Design

A purposeful sample of female camp alumnae ages 18 to 65 was identified based on a camp alumni database. Survey invitations were sent to 72 members of the alumnae email list and shared on a closed Facebook page. Thirty-one percent ($N = 22$) of the alumnae responded to the survey. Respondents were former campers and some had also served in camp leadership positions. Of the 22 respondents, 15 alumnae completed a counselors-in-training youth leadership program, fourteen served as counselors, and four worked in camp administration.

Because we wanted to examine career choice within the real-life context of one camp, a case study approach was selected. The study goal was not to be generalizable to the larger population, but rather to specifically examine the influence of camp experiences on the career development of girls who attended the selected camp. As a single case study, this project investigated a "contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18) in a situation that was considered to be typical of a traditional resident camp experience.

Instrument

Using an online survey, quantitative and qualitative data were collected on the influence of camp experiences on career choice and career development. Career choice categories were informed by the U.S. Department of Labor's standard occupational classification system (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a). The survey included a total of 27 questions. Five of the questions asked de-

mographic information such as “How old are you” and “Marital status.” Nine of the questions asked about their background at camp such as “How many years did you attend [camp]?” and “How old were you when you attended or worked at [camp]?” The 13 remaining questions were designed to examine the long-term impacts of camp experiences and specifically how camp might have influenced career development. Examples of these questions were “What top three skills did you gain from [camp] that you apply in your everyday life?” and “What do you remember most about your experience at [camp]?” Examples of specific questions related to career development included: “Have your [camp] experiences impacted your career choices?” and “Please elaborate how your [camp] experience has or has not impacted your career choices.”

Data Analysis

For this article, responses to questions from an online survey that focused on career development were analyzed. Descriptive statistics were analyzed with IBM SPSS 22, including frequency counts for respondent demographics and occupational categories. To investigate the influence of the camp experience on alumnae career choices, further analysis was conducted to examine potential differences over time. Respondents were placed into two groups based on age; the first group contained alumnae aged 18 to 30 ($n = 13$), and the second group contained alumnae aged 31 to 65 ($n = 9$). A Mann-Whitney U test, a rank-based nonparametric test used to determine if there are differences between two groups on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable, was performed to examine younger and older alumnae responses to whether or not camp experiences influenced their career choices (Agresti, 2013; Mann & Whitney, 1947).

Qualitative data associated with respondents’ career choices and the influence of camp experiences on career choice were analyzed using a two-step coding process (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The first step involved open coding, which consisted of identifying and labeling words and phrases that represented a specific idea (Bazeley, 2013). The second step involved axial coding, which consisted of refining and interpreting the initial codes as well as examining relationships between codes in order to develop themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The codes were sorted into the major themes and the original data were reread to ensure that the themes reflected the data. Three reviewers analyzed the data using this method (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Trustworthiness procedures included the use of informed readers (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) as well as examination of the data for negative cases. Two informed readers, who were familiar with the camp program yet were not involved directly with this study, performed an audit of the data analysis process and results (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and also the data to assess the dependability of the analysis. Negative cases were “instances in which the cases did not fit within the pattern” (Patton, 2002, p. 554). For example, if a respondent shared that the camp experience did not influence her career choice, then this

expression was identified as a negative case. In this study, two negative cases were identified during the data analysis process and used to better understand variations and diverse patterns in the results. These trustworthiness procedures affirmed the emergent codes and themes.

Results

Participant Demographics

The respondents identified as 100% female and 100% White. Respondents identified as either married (50%), never married (41%), or divorced (9%). The majority of respondents identified their individual income level as \$0–\$50,000 (41%), \$51,000–\$100,000 (32%), \$101,000–\$200,000 (9%), and greater than \$200,000 (18%). Alumnae ages ranged from 18 to 30 (41%), 31 to 45 (45%), and 51 to 65 (14%) and the vast majority of alumnae attended camp for at least three weeks at a time with only one respondent indicating a two week session as typical for their camp experiences. Responding alumnae also tended to be long-term campers with 91% of respondents indicating attending at least six summers in attendance. Nine percent of the alumnae attended camp for 3 to 5 years, 64% attended camp 6 to 10 years and 27% attended camp more than 10 years. Forty-five percent attended camp more than once during their youth with 45% attending more than one camp. Sixty-eight percent served as a counselor-in-training; 64% served as a counselor, and 18% worked in an administrative staff position.

Career Choice

Fifty-five percent of respondents shared that camp experiences definitely influenced their career choices and an additional 27% said that camp was somewhat influential in their career choices. Respondents were also asked to identify their current occupations (Figure 1). Based on Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010a) categories, the most common occupational category identified was “education, training, and library” followed by an equal number that selected “community and social services” or “management.” “Sales” was the next most common response, followed by an equal number of respondents that identified “Business and Finance,” “Architecture and Engineering,” “Life, Physical, and Social Sciences,” “Legal Occupations,” and “Healthcare.”

As previously described, the respondents were placed into two groups based on age to investigate potential differences over time. The first group contained alumnae aged 18 to 30 ($n = 13$), and the second group contained alumnae aged 31 to 65 ($n = 9$). No statistically significant differences in medians were found between the two groups (Mann-Whitney $U = 68.5$, $z = -.741$, $p = .512$). This non-parametric test was selected due to the small sample size and potential for non-normality in the data, thus reducing the potential for a Type 1 error (Agresti, 2013; Mann & Whitney, 1947).

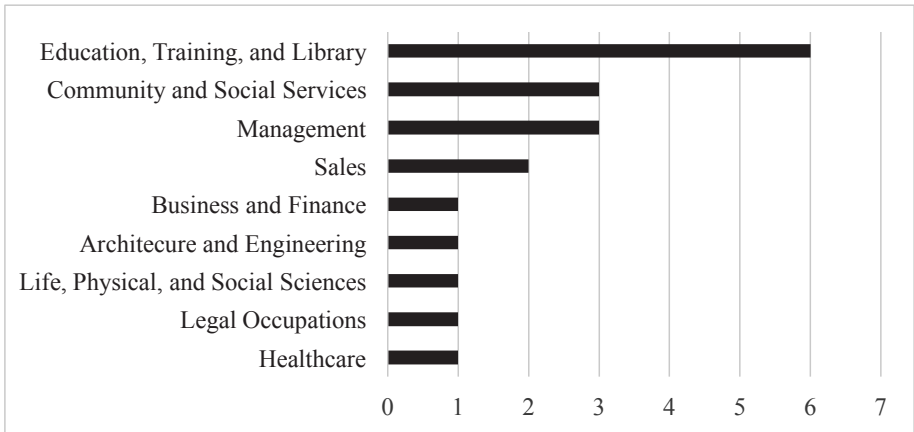


Figure 1. Camp Alumnae Current Occupations ($n = 22$)

Respondents were asked to elaborate on how camp experiences influenced their career choices. Two of the 22 respondents (i.e., the negative cases) shared that camp did not influence their career choices, but both felt that the experience had been influential on other aspects of their lives. Emergent themes based on data from the 20 respondents who identified career choice impacts of camp experiences included: (a) human service career interest, (b) outdoor career interest, (c) leadership and interpersonal skill development, and (d) social-emotional skill development. Two of these themes (*human service career interest* and *outdoor career interest*) reflected career choice and the other two themes (*leadership and interpersonal skill development* and *social-emotional skill development*) reflected skills that were supportive of career choice.

Human service career interest. A majority of the respondents identified that camp influenced their decisions to work in the human service field. For some, the camp experience helped them to value the act of helping others. One participant shared:

At [camp] you learn that true happiness and fulfillment comes from contributing to something bigger than yourself. As such, my career goals have always been driven by my mission to help others in need and to generally make the world a better place.

Direct experiences working with youth as a counselor or staff member were particularly impactful. As one respondent shared:

I am a teacher and I think that my time at camp definitely impacted me becoming a teacher. It was one of my first experiences teaching and caring for children, both while I was an older camper leader and as a counselor. [The director] teaching us child development (though I

didn't realize till college what it was really about) gave me a context and background into what I was seeing with the other campers.

For other respondents, camp shaped a career path that involved caring for other people. For example, one respondent reflected:

My [camp] was my first experience working with children (other than various babysitting jobs). This helped me realize that I love working with children and while I did not know exactly what I wanted to do, that was the first experience that helped me realize that I really wanted to work with children as a career. I also think that I learned a lot about working with and caring about other people which lead me to pursue a profession where I could be of service to others.

Outdoor career interest. Time spent in nature was influential for some of the respondents. For those respondents who mentioned the outdoors and nature, they were able to describe a clear path that associated camp experiences with an eventual outdoor-focused career. One respondent discussed:

I first experienced a connection with nature at [camp]. That connection led me to pursue a NOLS course and lots of outdoor opportunities throughout high school and college. Now, as a field geologist, part of my job is living and camping in nature for part of every year. I think that part of the reason I fell in love with geology in college was because of the connection I feel with nature, which was initiated at [camp].

The opportunity to experience the outdoors was uncommon in some respondents' lives and particularly unique to camp. As one alumnae noted:

[Camp] was a place to explore, engage with nature in ways I couldn't other than at camp, and learn and develop through a variety of experiences. It was a safe place to develop who I was becoming as a woman.

For this respondent, not only was nature contact impactful, but it was also associated with enhanced self-awareness. This respondent associated her sense of self and confidence, which was shaped through outdoor-based experiences camp, to who and what she became as an adult.

Leadership and interpersonal skill development. For some respondents, the influence of the camp experience was less about career choice and more about the development of skills that turned out to be valuable in the workplace. As one participant noted:

Although [camp] did not specifically influence my choice of profession, it did help me forge a work ethic and a confidence that I draw from whenever I feel burned out at work.

Communication was an important dimension of leadership and interpersonal skill development. A respondent shared:

I currently raise funds for a nonprofit. Learning at [camp] the ability to talk to anyone and everyone of all ages and try to understand them has impacted the way I try to work today.

Another respondent pointed out:

I am a human resource executive and my business is the well-being of all our employees; fairness, kindness, the ability to understand a different point of view, leadership, etc. [Camp] was my teacher and model.

A current senior vice president of an international market research company shared that the leadership she learned at camp contributed to her personal and professional success.

Social emotional skill development. Some respondents also spoke about the camp experience as important for the development of self-awareness and confidence that translated into career success. Examples of these expressions included how camp helped to “shape my outlook on what my strengths are” and camp gave me “confidence that was built through my experiences.” One respondent reflected: “I remember feeling like I belonged to a very special community, one where I was free to truly be myself, or at least able to discover who I might be.”

Challenges inherent to the nature-based setting of the camp experience seemed important within this theme, as respondents experienced growth by facing and overcoming challenges. As one respondent reflected:

What would have happened had I not gone to camp? I can tell you this...I wouldn't have been nearly as well rounded as I am. I wouldn't have had the confidence that was built through my experiences. Camp gave me free choice to travel the woods and paths as I desired. Make choices as I so choose, embrace challenges as I saw fit... push myself the way I wished...in a community where I felt comfortable.

Respondents indicated that learning to overcome challenges at camp gave them the skills needed to face and overcome challenges later in life. As shared by one respondent: “While leading a group of ten teachers, I rely on my experience as head counselor at [camp] to find the strengths in each teacher and use those strengths to help the team succeed as a whole.” Another respondent reflected on how her experiences in managing and overcoming stress and a challenging workload at camp helped her manage stress in higher education.

During my time in graduate school I got very overwhelmed and stressed out about my workload, then I remembered a [camp experience] when the head of the dock...there were only 3 of us, and I was in charge of synchro, including the final show, and had to do the camp newspaper, not to mention that I was basically the only counselor in the youngest cabin with 4 and 5 year olds. I got through that summer and did a good job, so I knew I could get through graduate school!

Discussion

The goal of this project was to examine the influence of the camp experience on career choice using a retrospective analysis from the perspective of female alumnae. The vast majority of respondents indicated that camp influenced their career choice and success, either by directly influencing their career choice or by helping them develop skills that were supportive of their career path. However, the potential influence of the camp experience on respondents' eventual career trajectory is perhaps most interesting. Although many of the women continued to follow what might be called feminized career trajectories (Heilman, 1997), as noted in Figure 1, the finding that the majority of alumnae pursued a management-related career is particularly compelling because "management" is not found in the top occupations for employed women nationwide (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010b).

Many of the study findings are consistent with the related literature on career development through camp, yet other findings appear to contradict prior research. In Brandt and Arnold's (2006) study of camp alumni, they found that camp experiences did not have a strong influence on career choice, at least not in terms of a youth-serving career. In contrast, this study found that 82% of respondents reported being either somewhat or greatly influenced by the camp experience. This finding reflects Garst et al.'s (2009) study of transformative learning, in which 72% of respondents indicated that camp influenced their career path. In this study, women reported a deeper understanding of themselves, which may reflect O'Sullivan's (2002) interpretation of transformative learning as a significant change in thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Camp alumni in DeGraaf and Glover's (2003) study mentioned future employment, but no respondent indicated that they pursued a career related to recreation or organized camping. This study produced similar results; however, youth-focused employment in teaching and other human service professions was common. These differences might reflect expected differences across small samples.

Respondents in this study shared that camp positively influenced skill development. Growth in social-emotional skills was reported in the areas of personal esteem and confidence, concepts which research shows are closely related aspects of personal identity (Schwartz & Pantin, 2006) as well as positive youth development. These findings add to the considerable body of literature that has identified, described, and emphasized the significant role of camp experiences in shaping social-emotional skills (Duerden, Widmer, Taniguchi, & McCoy, 2009; Ferrari & McNeely, 2007; Garst et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011).

Leadership and communication were two of the 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003) that respondents most closely associated with their career choices, and these skills were often mentioned within the social context of camp in which respondents recalled being supported by peers, staff, and the camp director. These findings support previous studies suggest-

ing that camp is a setting for positive youth development, in part because it provides youth with supportive relationships with peers and adults and the opportunity for skill building (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). The leadership experiences that some of the respondents reported as a camp counselor-in-training or camp counselor may explain some of the growth reported in leadership and interpersonal skills, however this study did not isolate that possible relationship. The importance of camp in facilitating leadership skills has been well established in the literature, and a relationship between leadership development in camp and a career trajectory that includes management is suggested by the results of this study.

The association respondents made between skill development and the capacity to overcome challenges both in camp and later in life is consistent with research by Bialeschki and Henderson (1993), who examined the challenges that women faced in outdoor settings. They found that successfully facing challenges helped women rid themselves of self- and societally imposed limitations, and that going beyond these perceived limitations contributed to a positive sense of self and a greater sense of personal empowerment. The development of a strong sense of self and personal empowerment may provide another explanation for why, as previously noted, “management” was a top occupation for the respondents in this study yet is not found in the top occupations for employed women nationwide (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010b).

The retrospective design of this study may have influenced the study findings. Duerden et al. (2014) have discussed the role of “post-camp realizations” (p. 41). Drawing on research by Allison (2005), the researchers noted that short-term, high-impact experiences like working at camp may take additional time to fully process. Thus, the more time that camp alumnae have to reflect on their camp experiences, the more likely the developmental outcomes of the experience may influence their lives (Duerden, Witt, & Taniguchi, 2012) and the more likely alumnae may become aware of the impacts of camp on their lives. Additionally, when alumnae are mindful of how their camp experiences influenced skill building, gainful employment, and career success, then they may attribute greater value to the camp experience. The way in which camp alumnae may recognize the benefits of camp experiences over time suggests that maintaining contact with camp alumnae (e.g., phone calls, letters, emails, social media, and so on) may be important for helping alumnae remain mindful of the role of the camp experience in their lives.

Privilege was an embedded issue in this study. The camp that was the focus of this case study is a traditional, private, single sex, residential camp program. The camp was started in 1923 following the new recreational movement to get youth out of the city and into the outdoors (Meier & Mitchell, 1993). While the program evolved to include contemporary activities such as adventure programming and shorter stays for campers, many traditions remain from the

camp's early days including camper teams for competitions, a commitment to outdoor living, an emphasis on group singing throughout the day, and small-group enrollment. These cornerstones are characteristic of many traditional girls' camps still in operation today. Many of these camps serve a privileged clientele of mostly white, upper middle class girls. Although the career choices identified by women in this study appeared to support the concept of Johnson and Koszyk (2008) women's occupational segregation into stereotypical "female" occupations, within the context of this study it was not feasible to fully explore the possible relationship between innate privilege and the camp experience. Career options for some of the alumnae, especially older women, may have been limited by class and race due to their privileged upbringing and the camp experience may have expanded the career options considered by these women (Lapour & Hepner, 2009).

The influence of highly regarded female camp staff as role models may have influenced the findings in this study. Research by Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) found that when women are in social contexts that exposed them to female leaders, they were less likely to express automatic stereotypic beliefs about women. Thus, by experiencing strong, positive, female role models at camp, alumnae may have changed their stereotypical beliefs about women's roles. Camp may therefore be a promising mechanism for enhancing career opportunities for women- moving them beyond stereotypically feminine jobs and into career paths that have typically been male-centric. Although the results of this study are not definitive, there is limited evidence that camp may have this effect on some female campers.

Practical Implications

Perhaps the most meaningful implication of this study is the value of surveying alumnae to better understand how, retrospectively, they describe the influence of the camp experience on both their adult lives and career choices. In general, case studies can provide valuable information to program providers working in contextually rich camps and other out-of-school time settings. Concrete examples and stories, often illustrated best through case studies, are ideal ways to understand youth development issues (Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development, 2014). Case study usefulness may only be limited by a lack of understanding of how case study findings can be applied (Yin, 2009). Program providers can learn from these results and consider implementing programmatic changes or replicating the study with former campers.

Beyond the value of learning more about alumnae experiences program providers can get insight into the relationship between life skills and career skills. Participants very clearly linked skills such as living with a small group of girls to an ability to work with diverse clients/ colleagues in their professional lives. Program providers can examine program design to provide ample

opportunities for not only learning life skills but also providing opportunities for discussion and reflection on what participants are experiencing and how those experiences can inform academic and future professional growth. Opportunities to see role models similar to themselves in leadership roles was also mentioned as an inspiration for envisioning their future selves. Program providers can examine internal leadership teams to ensure participants can see themselves reflected.

Implications for providers of programs targeting girls include some validation that girls may value the experience of single sex environment well into adulthood as they mature and reflect on how experiences in their youth impacted their choices. Additionally, although alumnae choose to pursue traditionally female careers, many of them became managers and supervisors within those fields and explicitly cited both leadership opportunities at camp as well as experiencing female role models as important components that gave them not just the skills but the idea that they could succeed in management. A third implication is for marketing of single sex camps and programs as having potentially unique outcomes for participants.

The camp that was targeted in this study, like many traditional residential camps, focuses on the development of life skills such as building friendships through group living or appreciating the natural world. Life skills such as these influence the social and emotional development of campers (Garst & Johnson, 2009; Garton, Miltenberger, & Pruett, 2007) but understanding that developmental trajectory in the context of the specific program is invaluable. Although career development was not a targeted program outcome of this camp, it clearly may be an indirect outcome of the camp experience, particularly when structures are in place to provide positive female role models that challenge gender stereotypic beliefs for female campers (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004).

Limitations

As a single case study, this research does not allow cause-effect relationships to be identified, nor can we generalize these findings to the larger population. However, this study did provide an appropriate method for closely examining the camp experience for alumnae and the influence camp has on girls' career choices. Although the sample size in this study was small and homogeneous (upper-income white women), it is consistent with the samples sizes in similar studies.

This study also failed to account for respondents' multiple careers or career paths, instead respondents provided information about their current careers. More information about respondents' career paths could paint a different picture about the possible relationship between camp experiences and career choice. Practical, experience-based training, such as camp employment, has been suggested as a suitable path for professionalization (Astroth, Garza, &

Taylor, 2004), and a closer examination of the career path of former camp staff would provide a clearer picture of how they progressed in their chosen fields.

Lastly, this study did not employ a member-check procedure. The use of a member-check would have provided an additional trustworthiness mechanism and also allowed for additional follow up with alumnae to better understand their responses to key research questions (Patton, 2002).

Future Directions

Much can be learned about the role of camp experiences in shaping the career trajectory of girls and women. In fact, considering that “gender, race, ethnicity, and disability all combine to frame the career choices girls and women make” (WEEA Equity Resource Center, 2002), we are only now scratching the surface of this area of camp research. Expanding this research with a national study of camp alumni would allow for better measurement of the influence of camp on career choice and it may also illuminate other long-term impacts of the camp experience. A national study of a more representative, random sample of camp alumni could also shed greater light on the occupations camp alumni are most likely to choose, and enhance our understanding of career barriers, constraints, facilitators, and trends related to camp experiences. Camp staff recruitment and placement efforts could be more effective with an understanding of the occupations most former campers and camp staff select given the challenges facing camp directors with filling seasonal camp staff positions (Browne & Bialeschki, 2011).

This study did not address the experiences of girls and young women in single sex programs in contrast to girls and young women in co-ed programs. While the researchers’ intent was not to compare and contrast experiences in single-sex verses coeducational programs, that comparison could be explored in the future.

A better understanding of how camp experiences influence occupational aspirations and eventual career choices can guide staff recruitment and retention efforts by helping camp staff recruiters articulate how camp experiences might be valuable as a career development mechanism for campers, counselors, and emerging adult staff. As noted by Ferrari & McNeely (2007), camp directors need to “capitalize on the potential to promote camp counseling as a workforce preparation experience” (p. 7). These are important messages not only for camper parents and caregivers, but also for other stakeholders interested in strategies for enhancing the workforce development skills of youth and emerging adults.

Considerations for future research include the testing of quantitative measures of career aspirations and career choice in camps. For example, the Career Aspiration Scale (CAS) has demonstrated sound psychometric properties when used with adolescent, college, and post-college samples of women (Gray & Obrien, 2007) and could be a promising approach for measuring occupa-

tional aspirations or career choice among past and current camp populations. The findings of this study could help camp staff tailor their programs to enhance career aspirations.

Researchers have called for investigations into the origins and development of young girls' beliefs about the role of women in society (Obrien & Fassinger, 1993), and studies that examine the role of camp experiences in shaping girls' perceptions of gender and other societal roles would also be valuable. Theories related to achievement motivation (McClland, 1953) might inform future research on these topics. *Achievement motivation*, which emphasizes the cognitive and social determinants of motivation, focuses on explaining how the motive to achieve and the motive to avoid failure influence performance. Achievement motivation has been closely correlated with work values, vocational interests, and job-specific skills (Collins, Hanges, & Locke, 2004; Salami, 2004) and has been identified as a predictor of career choice. People with high achievement motivation and low fear of failure have more accurate occupational perceptions and aspire to higher level occupations when compared people low in achievement motivation and high in fear of failure (Salami, 2004). Based on the results of this study, it might be posited that camp experiences influence the career choices of women by promoting self-confidence, reducing fears, and providing skill-building opportunities.

The previously mentioned research by Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) is another promising model for exploring the influence of camp experiences on girls' perceptions of gender and societal roles. Are female campers that are exposed to strong, positive female counselors—at all-girls or co-educational camps—more likely to pursue an occupation that is counterstereotypical for women? The findings from this study are encouraging and suggest that the answer may be “yes.” Long-term studies of the impacts of camp experiences could include a more thorough examination of the influence of female camp staff on female campers' perceptions of gender stereotypes and subsequent influence on career choice. Furthermore, recognizing that gender differences in field of study continue to disadvantage women (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007), future research should examine how camp employment by women may influence them to pursue fields in which their management and leadership skills—particularly valuable skills that are acquired and/or honed at camp—may make them more likely to achieve positions with higher salaries than positions that they may have pursued without their camp-enhanced abilities.

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