

Experiences of YMCA Day Camp Counsellors and their Perceptions of Youth

Amy Webster

Critical Sociology

**Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

**Faculty of Social Sciences, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario**

©2021

ABSTRACT

A large body of research examines the benefits of youth programming for children and their families, yet there is limited research that specifically focuses on day camps and the experiences of camp counsellors. My MA thesis explores the experiences of YMCA day camp counsellors and their perceptions of the children with whom they work. More specifically, I explore how camp counsellors perceive campers' strengths, assets, and home life, the extent to which camp counsellors impose neoliberal values onto youth, and the social and developmental benefits of the camp experience for both campers and counsellors. Drawing on social capital theory (e.g., Putnam, 2000), Tara Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, and the "multiple worlds" model of Phelan et al. (1991), this thesis was undertaken with two broad objectives: (1) to understand the broader ideological forces that inform youth programming and the implications for creating an inclusive and equitable camping experience for diverse populations of young people; and (2), to illuminate the ways in which campers and counsellors benefit from participation in camp from a social and psychological standpoint.

The study is informed by qualitative interviews with eight study participants who were previously employed as YMCA day camp counsellors for a minimum of one full summer. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to elicit camp counsellors' experiences along with their perceptions of youth and youth programming. These interview data are triangulated with my personal experience as a YMCA day camp counsellor. My findings highlight the drive and dedication that camp counsellors have to bettering the lives of the children they worked with. In addition, the study spotlights the ways in which youth programming is informed by the dominant neoliberal ideology. Despite the noble intentions of camp counsellors, this can result in a camping experience where neoliberal values are imposed on diverse populations of youth with

little consideration of the unique challenges that might inform resistant attitudes, or the strengths and assets that marginalized youth produce within their families and communities. In spite of these limitations and concerns, camp functions as a space where campers and counsellors have the opportunity to build constructive forms of bridging and bonding social capital. Lastly, I argue that camp has a vital role to play in an age of helicopter parenting where interaction by way of electronic devices has largely supplanted face-to-face interaction. In short, this thesis reveals both the shortcomings and benefits of the day camp experience, and unveils the complexities and challenges associated with youth programming in an increasingly diverse and unequal society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Kevin Gosine for being so supportive throughout my entire MA journey. You have not only helped me become a better writer, but a better student and researcher. You have helped me to think critically about youth work and have opened my eyes to helpful theories and frameworks to better conceptualize my research. I could not have done this without you.

To my wonderful committee members, Dr. Mary-Beth Raddon, and Dr. Shannon Moore. Both of you have been extremely supportive throughout this entire process and I am forever grateful. Mary-Beth, your continuous dedication to providing constructive feedback has helped to improve my writing and think critically about my research. Shannon, you have taught me so much about qualitative methods and the importance of being reflexive in my research. Thank you both for guiding me in the right direction and supporting my work from beginning to end.

I want to thank the YMCA day camp counsellors that took part in this research project. Your continuous enthusiasm with the interview process made the interviews both intellectually stimulating and enjoyable. Your dedication to youth work has reaffirmed my beliefs that camp counsellors are a special bunch of individuals who exude positivity. This research would not have been possible if it was not for each of you.

A huge thank you to my family, boyfriend, and my best friend for being here throughout this entire process. Mom, dad, and my sister Amanda, you have always been supportive of my academic endeavors and I cannot thank you enough. Thank you to my loving boyfriend Dillen. You have always believed in me and have assured me that I am intelligent and can be successful in the world of academia when I did not think that it was possible. Thank you to my best friend Brynn who has been by my side from the beginning of my university career until now. Your continuous support has meant the world to me.

Thank you to my external examiner Dr. Troy Glover, because of you I felt comfortable throughout my entire thesis defense. Conversations about my research were stimulating and I am thankful you agreed to be a part of this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Study	2
YMCA of Greater Toronto	3
History of the YMCA	4
Types of Summer Camps.....	6
Benefits of Youth Programing	7
Research Purpose and Objectives	12
Methodology	12
Organization of this Thesis	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Marginalized Youth Subcultures	17
Youth Programming.....	21
Job Satisfaction of Youth Workers	21
Psychological Challenges Faced by Camp Counsellors	25
Strategies for Working Effectively with Youth	28
Youth Programs as Vehicles for Building Social Capital.....	31
Neoliberal Influences on Youth Programming	34
Theoretical Framework: “Multiple Worlds” and “Community Cultural Wealth”.....	38
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	44
Qualitative Social Research	45
Semi-Structured Interviews	46
Data Collection and Analysis.....	48
Reflexivity.....	49
Social Location	50
CHAPTER FOUR: BEST JOB EVER?	52
Why Youth Work?.....	52
YMCA: A Resource for Low Income Families	57
Challenges Faced by Camp Counsellors.....	63
The Value Beads Program	66
The Value Beads Program as an Example of Neoliberal Programming.....	69

What is Appropriate Behaviour?	73
Camp Counsellors as Neoliberal Role Models	74
Summary	75
CHAPTER FIVE: TO KNOW, OR NOT TO KNOW	77
Perceptions of Campers' Homelife.....	77
Pathologizing Campers and their Communities	84
The Strengths and Assets of Youth.....	88
Camp as a Site for the Cultivation of Social Capital	89
Social Capital from Different Worlds.....	92
Summary	94
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	97
Overall Benefits of Summer Camp for Campers and Staff	98
The Importance of Camp to Children in the Smartphone Age	99
Helicopter Parenting	101
The Rewards and Challenges of Youth Work	104
How do YMCA Day Camp Counsellors Perceive their Roles?	106
Neoliberal Values and YMCA Programming.....	108
Recognition of Home life, Strengths and Assets	110
APPENDIX.....	114
Semi- Structured Interview Guide	114
REFERENCES	116

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging jobs I have held was working as a camp counsellor with the YMCA of Greater Toronto for three consecutive summers. After working as a children's gymnastics coach for multiple years, I knew I wanted to find a job where I could continue to impact the lives of young people. I knew that the YMCA was a charitable organization and often provided funding for youth to attend day camps. That was very appealing to me as I wanted to make a difference in young people's lives, providing them with a safe space to play games, have fun, and just be a kid. I wanted to be a person that kids could look up to, someone who provided them with fun experiences while broadening their horizons by way of new experiences.

I also knew that camp counsellors are often upbeat individuals with high energy, which is exactly the kind of person I am. Working with young people has always been a passion of mine and getting the opportunity to work with them full time as a summer camp counsellor sounded like a fun and rewarding job. Little did I know at the time I applied that I would continue to work with the YMCA for consecutive summers. Working as a camp counsellor was one of the most difficult yet rewarding jobs that I have had to this day.

Camp counsellors ensure that all children are well behaved, engaged, participating in activities and getting along with other campers. Many nights coming home from work I had to take a moment to myself and reflect on the day. I thought about the potential impact I had on the lives of the children with whom I worked. I often wondered whether I was sometimes too strict with the children, as I occasionally raised my voice and demanded certain behaviours. Such frustration-induced actions would later trigger regret. Was I being too hard on the kids, instead of working with them to understand their frustrations? Was this a case of a middle-class White person attempting to manage and control a group of young people? Was I mirroring larger,

hegemonic patterns of subordination and domination that prevailed within the wider society? Though this question may be hyperbolic, it is a question worth considering when working with youth from marginalized communities. Working as a camp counsellor has spurred thoughts about what strengths various children have, if I can work with their strengths, or if their strengths get lost amidst authoritative approaches to dealing with children. I often wondered if my colleagues were having similar thoughts and feelings regarding their work with youth. By way of qualitative research strategies, my goal for this thesis is to understand camp counsellors' perceptions of youth, the strengths and assets that young people bring to camp, and why camp counsellors choose youth work for their summer jobs. These questions are important as they are useful for youth workers who serve a wide array of children and families to reflect on their experiences and practices when guiding and influencing young people. My MA thesis has implications for youth programming insofar as it spurs critical reflection on larger ideological influences that inform youth work and the ramifications for creating inclusive and accommodating camp experiences.

The Study

My experience as a camp counsellor has motivated me to undertake a qualitative research study in which I reflect on my own experiences as a youth worker as well as investigate the perceptions and workplace experiences of YMCA day camp counsellors serving young people in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This study is aimed at increasing understandings of the motivations and practice philosophies of camp counsellors and the impact of their outlook and approach on the lives of the young people camp counsellors serve. While there is research that explores the day camp experience from the standpoint of youth participants (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2006; Fields, 2008), this project will study the perceptions, understandings, youth work practices, and

motivations of the people responsible for guiding and mentoring young people who take part in such programs.

This study of the perspectives of camp counsellors who work with marginalized youth was guided by three overarching questions: First, what social and developmental benefits do counsellors and young campers gain from the camping experience? Second, what broader influences shape camp counsellors' perceptions of what constitutes a positive or beneficial camp experience for young people? Third, do YMCA camp counsellors strive to transform the young people with whom they work or are they able to recognize and work with the cultural wealth that diverse youth bring to the camp context? Of course, it is recognized that elements of both approaches may be present in youth work practices of day camp counsellors. Tara Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth and Phelan et al. (1991) multiple worlds model, along with a considerable body of relevant empirical literature, will be used to contextualize and make sense of my findings.

YMCA of Greater Toronto

The YMCA of Greater Toronto is a charitable organization that is committed to creating healthy children and families with an emphasis on community and inclusivity. The YMCA takes pride in being an inclusive organization where families and youth can participate in various programs, take on different roles within their community, and become healthy and well-adjusted individuals. Along with being a place to exercise and make friends, different branches within the YMCA offer employment services, counselling, substance abuse programs, and youth housing. These programs are geared towards enriching the lives of young people and, in the case of troubled youth, getting their lives back on track (YMCAGTA, 2017). In addition to the emphasis on health and enrichment, the YMCA is highly committed to diversity and social

inclusion. The YMCA GTA website states: “We regard the diversity of people and communities as assets and recognize their contribution to the social, political and cultural enrichment of the GTA and this Association” (YMCAGTA, 2017). Making people feel comfortable and valued is of the utmost importance for the YMCA as an organization. The YMCA in 2018 was named one of Canada’s best diversity employers, 2018; this was the 7th time that the YMCA had received this honour, demonstrating the Y’s dedication to inclusivity (YMCA GTA NEWS, 2018). Along with inclusivity, YMCA programming is guided by five other “core values”. These core values include respect, responsibility, health, caring, and honesty. The core values are what “influences our actions and the decisions we make” (YMCA GTA, 2017). All employees working for the YMCA are reminded to align themselves with these values, conveying their importance to members and community partners.

History of the YMCA

While today the YMCA places a strong emphasis on social inclusion and diversity, this was not always the case. The YMCA, which stands for Young Men’s Christian Association, was founded in 1844 in London England, “in response to unhealthy social conditions brought on by the Industrial revolution” (YMCA History, n.d). YMCA’s are one of the oldest non-government organizations in the world (Muukkonen, 2002). Over time, the YMCA grew larger, and by the early 1900s, the Y played an important role for the church as YMCA sites served as “forums where future church leaders learn practical work” (Muukkonen, 2002 p. 18). Other fields that the YMCA pioneered involved “work with refugees, military canteens and work with prisoners of war” (Muukkonen, 2002 p. 18). Furthermore, the YMCA has been “a pioneer in many activities and practices” such as “youth clubs, youth centres, gang work, scouting, youth camps, and international youth assemblies” (Muukkonen, 2002 p. 18).

Diorio (1998) states that the YMCA is a “historically Christian evangelistic association that has changed over the years to become a religiously pluralistic community service organization” (p.7). Throughout its history, the YMCA has always been concerned with charitable social reform and character-building through recreational activity. As Zalda and Denton (1963) state, “the YMCA is largely concerned with developing the skills and character of its members” (p. 215). Positive development, and the YMCA values of respect, responsibility, inclusivity, caring, and health all continue to be present in the organizational agenda. As I will show, the YMCA’s origin as a social reform-oriented Christian charity is significant because the present-day secular organization continues to be geared toward influencing and molding the lives of young people.

Today, the Christian identity of the YMCA has faded into the background, but the impulse behind the YMCA’s work, values, and mission continues to be in the do-good, social reform spirit of Christian charity. Diorio (1998) explains, “The YMCA’s response to meeting the needs and wants of a pluralistic society has resulted in a decided shift away from the original mission of the organization” (p. 27). Putting less emphasis on Christian values was necessary for the YMCA to become a secular non-profit organization that receives large government grants.

The decision to expand outside of offering services to a specific Christian population proved to be beneficial for the YMCA as an organization. Extension of services to both women and other age groups “allowed the organization to broaden its scope of orientation” (Zald & Denton, 1963 p. 219). Broadening the scope meant focusing more on character development for all individuals and communities through programs and services (Zald & Denton 1963). In addition, a broad range of goals allowed for “wide diversification” that is “conducive to organizational flexibility” (p. 221). The YMCA continues to be a mission-oriented organization

that seeks to instill neoliberal values that morally reform young people. The organization's mission is deeply rooted but continues to grow and develop with social changes. A historical discussion of the YMCA is important as camp counsellors often play a role in reproducing neoliberal values. Later in chapter 4, I will discuss the YMCA value beads program as an example of a programming measure whereby camp counsellors (unwittingly) promote neoliberal values to young campers.

Types of Summer Camps

An important tenet of the YMCA mandate is to support and empower young people. Summer day camps have therefore long been a staple of YMCA programming and are attended by millions of children throughout North America (Bialeschki, Henderson & James, 2007). Ranging from indoor to outdoor, overnight to full summers, camps strive to bring young people together by way of group programming (Meier & Henderson, 2012). The research presented in this thesis focuses on day camps. Typically, day camps run eight to ten weeks depending on the summer and the organization. The YMCA specifically, offers both outdoor camps which include activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and boating, as well as indoor camps which include activities such as cooking/baking, variety, arts, and science. YMCA day camps offer 'before care' that starts at 7 am and 'after care' that ends at 6 pm in most locations. Parents have the option to drop their child off at one location and bus to another or drive their child directly to the desired YMCA location. Hours are lengthened to accommodate parents who work early or later in the evening. Day camps are a great option for parents who are unable to afford to send their child to an overnight camp where costs are often higher (Meier & Henderson, 2012).

In addition, the different types of camps are also organized in various ways. As Meier and Henderson (2012) notes, "[t]he most commonly used categories to describe particular

affiliations or sponsorships of camps are organization or agency not-for-profit camps, independent for-profit or private camps, religiously affiliated camps and government sponsored camps” (p. 8). The YMCA specifically fits under the not-for-profit category. Traditionally, not-for-profit organizations “provide camp opportunities to serve youth, adults, and families as a means for furthering their mission and objectives” (Meier & Henderson, 2012 p. 8). Not-for-profit camps can be ideal for low-income families as campers usually pay only nominal fees (Meier & Henderson, 2012). For the YMCA specifically, government funds are also available for low-income families and can sometimes subsidize the child’s entire summer at camp. Meier and Henderson (2012) explain that not-for-profit camps often have high enrolment and proclaim a commitment to making the camp experience available to all.

Benefits of Youth Programing

Youth programs, specifically summer camps, give young people the opportunity to forget the challenges and frustrations they face outside of camp and focus on fun and interactive activities. As Meier and Henderson (2012) write, “Campers live in their own world, associate closely with counsellors and others in their program group, and often do activities with their camp as a whole” (p. 25). Due to the all-day nature of summer camp, children are often spending more time with camp friends and counsellors than they are with their families. Strong relationships can be cultivated between campers and counsellors during their days spent at camp. Camp gives young people structure and the opportunity to mingle with other children who they may have never met outside of the camping world.

From my experiences as a camp counsellor, I witnessed the many bonds created between campers and staff. Many campers had a favourite counsellor whom they looked up to and wished to spend time with. Some children made new friends at camp who share the same interests as

them, making the camp experience more exciting. When I saw friendships with other campers or bonds with counsellors, camp always seemed to me like a safe environment where kids could just be themselves. Creating a fun space to which kids wanted to return the next day was important to me as I wanted camp to be a place where kids could go and forget about any struggles they may be facing in their lives. With a positive attitude and a lot of energy, I strived to build young people's confidence, showing them that they will always be accepted at camp. I noticed many campers gained the confidence to share their thoughts and feelings with other counsellors over the summer. I watched some children struggle behaviourally at the beginning of the summer and by the end, they were able to channel their frustrations into constructive conversations. Youth programs, and camp specifically, offer young people a place to go to make friends, be silly, and have fun with both campers and counsellors.

Camp literature frequently emphasizes the influence that camp has on positive and healthy youth development (Bialeschki, Henderson, Scanlin, Thurber, Whitaker & Marsh, 2006; Henderson & Meier, 2012; Schelbe, Hansen, France, Rony & Twichell, 2018). According to the American Camping Association (2006b), "Youth who attend camps are likely to develop social skills, confidence and self-esteem as well as grow more independent and adventurous" (quoted in Schelbe, Hansen, France, Rony & Twichell, 2018 p. 442). Henderson et al (2006) explain that a critical goal of youth programming is building healthy relationships between youth and adults. Evidently, many children do not have supportive adult figures in their lives (Henderson et al, 2006). Camps and other programs give youth the opportunity to create these healthy and supportive relationships (Schelbe et al, 2018). Meier and Henderson (2012) highlight how focusing on positive youth development is not about the problems of youth, but more importantly, how to guide them toward successful adulthood. Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler and

Henderson (2007) discuss one of the first studies that focused on the outcomes of camp in 1929. This study examined 216 young boys who attended 7 weeks of camp in Ontario. The study by Dimock and Hendry found that the boys showed positive behavioural changes and improvements in terms of their social skills, independence, and willingness to try new things (cited in Thurber et al, 2007). Camps continue to focus on positive and healthy development by providing high-quality programming and experiences for those who participate (Thurber et al, 2007).

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter two, an important means by which camps support the psychosocial development of young people is through the cultivation of social capital – connections or social ties that nourish social trust and provide people with the resources to cope with adversity and formulate and pursue worthwhile aspirations. In his 2000 book *Bowling Alone* political scientist Robert Putnam documents the importance of social capital for children and youth. Looking at the US, he explains the deep connection between social capital and healthy development. Putnam cites research which found that child abuse rates escalate when a community is less cohesive. One study cited compared two neighborhoods: one with high rates of child maltreatment and the other with lower rates. The prevalence of social capital was found to be a strong predictor of child maltreatment (Putnam, 2000). According to the research cited by Putnam (2000), the extent to which children living in impoverished communities are able to avoid abuse and neglect, along with associated behavioural and emotional ramifications, is contingent on “the degree to which [young people] and their mothers were enmeshed in a supportive social network, lived in a socially supportive neighborhood, and attended church regularly” (p. 299). Putnam (2000) explains that vulnerable or “at-risk” children are “particularly vulnerable to social-capital deficits” yet benefit the most from the advantages that social capital has to offer, such as connectedness, friendship, emotional support, mentorship, and guidance (p.

299). Social capital is strongly correlated with educational outcomes. Putnam shows that young people in US states and communities with higher social capital are more likely to be more academically engaged and successful in school.

Putnam also emphasizes the importance of social capital within families. Young people who have close-knit families and parents who are involved in their schooling are less likely to drop out of school than those who lack this form of social capital (Putnam, 2000). In all, relationships that foster social capital have various benefits for young people. Social capital is crucial for positive youth development in that it enhances educational success, boosts civic participation, reduces the chances that children will experience abuse and neglect, and promotes healthy and trusting relationships.

In camps, young people have the opportunity to develop social capital by way of supportive staff-youth relationships which can contribute to healthy and positive youth development (Anderson-Butcher, Cash, Saltzburg, Midle & Pace, 2004; Brown & D'Eloia, 2016). It is conceivable that the social capital created at camp can, to some degree, make up for a dearth of social capital within kids' families, communities, and schools. Staff in youth programming positions are expected to take on leadership roles and develop caring relationships with young people (Anderson-Butcher et al, 2004). Summer camp counsellors often have strong relationships with campers as they are spending consecutive days with them. The relationships adults make with youth can be beneficial in several ways. Trusting adult figures may lend support, enhance young people's self-esteem, and guide them in reaching their goals (Anderson-Butcher et al, 2004). Furthermore, camp research reveals that young people value the camp experience and benefit from skills that are learned over the summer (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005; Schelbe et al, 2018). Schelbe et al. (2018) study found that camp counsellors believe

young people's self-esteem, positivity, and confidence increased while being at camp.

Counsellors in this study stated that their campers gradually grew more comfortable talking to others, asking for help, and felt more positive about new relationships, activities, and experiences (Schelbe et al, 2018).

From personal experience, creating bonds with campers was one of my favourite parts about working as a camp counsellor. That is, I appreciated the opportunity to serve as a source of social capital for youth. For campers who attend camp for the entire summer, it was interesting to see how open they were with me from the first day of camp to the last. On the first day of camp, campers are normally reserved and often wary of new counsellors. I remember on my first day specifically, there was a young girl who told me that she would not like me because I was new and not the counsellor, she had last summer. By the last week of the summer, this camper wrote me a letter telling me that I was the best counsellor that she ever had. When we saw each other for the final time she had tears streaming down her face knowing she would not see me during the school year.

The first interaction I had with this young girl represented a major shift. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to gain this camper's trust and be the best camp counsellor I could be. Sure enough, my hard work paid off. Since I was a dance and drama counsellor, children often came into camp without dance experience and looked to me for help. I created a bond with this camper by helping her improve her dance skills, breaking down every move, teaching her at any free moment I had. She revealed to me that no one ever took the time to help her, leaving her convinced that she would never learn to dance. I reassured her that everyone has different learning speeds and that I would help her until she understood what to do. This is how I gained her trust, creating an unforgettable bond with her.

When bonding with campers it was always important to simply listen to what they have to say. I found that if you listen to young people, they will often trust that you are someone in whom they can confide in. I made it a personal goal to always listen to my campers' frustrations and show them that I care about their needs. Campers confided in me and trusted that I was a safe person to go to when they were struggling or just wanted someone to talk to. From my experiences as a camp counsellor, I now understand the importance of positive relationships between young people and adults. It is evident through the literature, as well as my own experiences, that youth programs have the potential to offer copious benefits for young people. Whether it be positive development, the strong relationships built between children and adults, or the creation of safe spaces, young people can benefit from youth programming.

Research Purpose and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to explore multiple aspects of youth work, with a focus on the unique abilities and assets that young people bring to camp in order to understand the extent to which strengths and assets are recognized and engaged in by counsellors. I set out to explore the following: how camp counsellors perceive their roles and what they envision as the benefits of the camping experience for all involved; the strategies and practices counsellors employ to create an inclusive environment and promote participant engagement at camp; how camp counsellors understand the communal and familial contexts of the youth with whom they work; and, finally, how camp counsellors attempt to build upon the unique strengths and assets that young people bring from their communities and families.

Methodology

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight former YMCA day camp counsellors. I opted for a qualitative research design as I am interested in learning about the

subjective perceptions and experiences of camp counsellors who work with diverse populations of young people. As a researcher, I was looking for verbal accounts of the varying experiences of camp counsellors, which Elliot and Timulk (2005) explain is necessary in qualitative research. Furthermore, I utilized open-ended questions in my interviews to initiate conversation about the camp counsellor experience (Elliot & Timulk, 2005). My qualitative methodology engages in the procedures of semi-structured interviewing.

Following the work of Elliot (2005), I understand reflexivity as “a heightened awareness of the self, acting in the social world” (p. 153). Having self-awareness is critical as it allows a researcher to maximize transparency and trust when working with study participants. Reflexivity is also important as it enables the researcher to be critically aware of how they are representing the community that they are researching. This entails being perennially cognizant of the influence of personal biases, and predispositions, along with the possibility of identifying too closely with those we are studying (Elliot, 2005).

I was employed with the YMCA day camps for four years, the first two years as a day camp counsellor and my last two years as a program head where I was responsible for supervising several counsellors. I, therefore, had the connections necessary to obtain a sample of participants. As a white, middle-class woman who has previous experience with being a day camp counsellor, this topic interested me as I wanted to know how others who work as day camp counsellors perceive their role at camp as well as the young people with whom they work. I wanted to know this as I personally chose a job with the YMCA because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people. I constantly questioned what campers were going through outside of camp, as I experienced many situations where youth would convey to me their

struggles at home. I wondered if my co-workers also had these questions and if they wanted to make an impact in children's lives.

Whitson (2017) explains that reflexivity “functions as a means of increasing the researcher's awareness of inequitable power relations framing the research process and context” (p. 300). The integration of my personal insights from my social location and through the engagement of reflexivity was an intentional research method and tool of analysis. Reflexivity is important in my research as I feel my work as a camp counsellor allowed me to understand the viewpoints of participants, while the studies I have undertaken and experience I have acquired since working as a counsellor have enabled me to critically situate my findings. And while I realize my education has provided the lens through which I have interpreted my findings, it was not my intention to juxtapose the perceptions of my participants with my own perceptions and assumptions about the camp experience. I critically engage with participants' narratives without portraying them as somehow unenlightened or unprogressive, as I too am a former camp counsellor with similar positionality.

My goal with this study was to learn about camp counsellors' motivations, workplace experiences, and common youth work practices employed today and to consider the larger sociological forces that influence these phenomena along with the potential implications for the youth served.

Organization of this Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters, including the introduction. Chapter two presents a review of existing literature organized into seven themes: marginalized youth subcultures, youth programming, job satisfaction among youth workers, psychological challenges faced by camp counsellors, strategies youth workers utilize, youth programs and

building social capital, and lastly, neoliberal influences on youth programming. Each of the seven sections connects to the experiences of camp counsellors as well as how important community programs are for young people. This review of the existing literature reveals a gap in research pertaining to the daily experiences of camp counsellors and how they perceive the young people with whom they work. I present a discussion that focuses on camp counsellors and their personal experiences as youth workers, whilst also incorporating past research primarily focused on youth's experiences, and how community programs benefit young people.

Chapter three provides a description and rationale for my qualitative methodological approach where I utilized semi-structured interviews and reflexive methods of inquiry. I discuss how I selected participants and thematically analyzed the data collected. I then reflect on the possible downfalls of having insider status and how I addressed potential researcher bias. Lastly, I convey the importance of reflexivity and how I incorporated research reflexivity into my study.

In Chapters four and five I outline my research findings. In Chapter four, entitled "Best Job Ever?", I begin by presenting findings on why camp counsellors ultimately chose to work with youth. I then discuss how the YMCA is utilized by low-income families and the impact that community programming has on young people. The next theme I discuss pertains to the challenges that camp counsellors face, and how the YMCA value beads program is used as a means of managing camper behaviour. I then convey how the value beads program can be used as a powerful tool to impose dominant social norms and behaviours onto campers. The incentive-based value beads program is designed to persuade children to exhibit behaviours that align with neoliberal values. A discussion surrounding what is considered 'appropriate' behaviour follows, along with how camp counsellors ultimately serve as figures that model dominant neoliberal values.

Chapter five, “To know, or not to Know”, discusses the critical question: does knowing the home life of young people matter? Do camp counsellors benefit from knowing what children are going through at home when they leave the camp environment? Next, I examine how camp counsellors frequently pathologize campers and their communities, often without knowing they are doing so. Finally, this chapter highlights how camp can act as an avenue where youth can gain various forms of social capital, and how the camp environment gives youth the ability to bond with peers and create meaningful relationships with staff.

The concluding chapter, Chapter six, provides a reiteration of my research questions and a summary of my research findings. I offer a perspective on children’s use of mobile internet devices, social media and the proliferation of helicopter parenting, and how these social trends relate to the camp experience and children’s overall well-being. Lastly, I discuss how prominent neoliberal values permeate the camp experience, and how the YMCA as an organization plays into these values and ultimately promotes them by way of their value beads program. I end by reflecting on the importance of youth programs, and how these programs may benefit from changing programming standards to accommodate the needs, interests, and realities of all youth.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I review research literature and theoretical perspectives on marginalized youth identities as well as the benefits, pitfalls, and ideological underpinnings of youth programming. Firstly, I will review the literature on marginalized youth subcultures, specifically the values to which marginalized youth adhere and the characteristics of youth subcultures, including resistance. Next, I review the literature on youth work and youth programming. I have divided this literature into five themes: job satisfaction of youth workers, psychological challenges experienced by counsellors, strategies individuals use when working with youth, youth programs as vehicles for building social capital, and neoliberal influences on youth programming. Finally, I outline the theoretical perspectives that will inform my research. I employed Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth and the "multiple worlds" model of Phelan et al. (1991) to understand the social capital and assets that are fostered within the communities and families of youth along with how young people transition between their home communities and the camp environment. I envision YMCA day camps as another "world" that young people must navigate, and, among other things, I was interested in the strategies camp counsellors employ to bridge the potentially pronounced divide between young people's communities and the camp experience.

Marginalized Youth Subcultures

The research literature on marginalized youth subcultures is plentiful. Several studies assess how young people cope with challenges in their lives, how various challenges affect their educational engagement and outcomes, and the relationships that young people make with each other and authority figures (Bottrell, 2007; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Mainieri & Anderson, 2015; Patel, Liddell & Ferreira, 2018). A large body of literature is focused on the ways in which youth

traverse mainstream educational systems that are largely unresponsive to their needs (Chu, Guarino, Mele, O'Connell & Coto, 2019; Learned, 2016; Smith, 2000). More specifically, these researchers have explored how marginalized youth often struggle with academic success, the reasons for these challenges, and how young people cope. Bottrell (2007) argues that a desire for academic success is “often associated with ‘white’ values, and individuals who fail academically are deemed as ‘resisters’ or ‘at risk’” (p. 598). “Resistances”, writes Bottrell (2007), “are defined as practices which express opposition to rules and norms in specific contexts” (p. 599). The perception that marginalized youth are likely linked to social problems such as poverty, violence, and delinquency often leads to such young people being profiled by educators who tend to hold low expectations of them (Bottrell, 2008). Young people must find ways to cope with assumptions, discriminatory treatment, and practices, which is where resistance commonly serves as means of coping (Bottrell, 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

In Bottrell's (2008) study, the students interviewed explained that being labeled as youth with behavioural problems often led them to misbehave further. Bottrell (2008) argues that student resistance can be conceptualized as a “critique of curriculum, teachers and processes of school labeling, as limiting not only educational outcomes, but also young people's scope for being who they are” (p. 604). In an ethnographic study of young people who attended an inner-city Washington, DC high school, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) discovered that African American youth largely rejected mainstream ‘white,’ middle-class values and ideals, such as being successful in school, and put great importance on communal solidarity. Young African Americans perceived mainstream schooling and the wider society as systemically holding Black Americans down. They questioned the notion of school as a vehicle for vertical mobility for people like themselves. As a result, such youth did not typically prioritize their studies. In

general, the oppression experienced by such young people led many to resist their schooling along with other dominant 'white' social structures. Fordham and Ogbu observed that academically engaged African American students were often chided by Black peers for "acting white" and being "sell-outs."

In a qualitative study of diverse, largely non-white youth living in a low-income Toronto community, Gosine and Islam (2014) similarly found strong connections and a salient sense of communal loyalty. This "defensively-situated" communal identity was shaped by the intersecting racial and class oppression that these youth experienced within the wider White-dominated, and middle-class normed, society (Gosine & Islam, 2014, p. 55). As Gosine and Islam (2014) write, "[t]he sense of community articulated by student participants clearly served an empowering function in their lives, as these youth took pride in a self-proclaimed toughness cultivated by the ongoing challenges they endure, such as stereotyping and stigmatization, phenomena experienced to a comparable degree by few young people within the broader society" (p. 54). Echoing Gosine and Islam (2014), Bottrell (2007) discussed how marginalized youth created their own networks of support to which they were exceedingly loyal. Creating their own social network let marginalized youth feel a sense of belonging that was missing at school (Bottrell, 2007). Despite academic success often not being the main priority, it is important to recognize the other strengths and assets that marginalized youth cultivate within their communities and families. Loyalty, strong friendships, sticking up for one another, and a strong sense of community are important characteristics of marginalized youth subcultures (Bottrell, 2007; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gosine, 2021; Gosine & Islam, 2014; Gosine & Tabi, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Marginalized youth may be better served by an education system that recognizes their sense of community, highlights their lived experiences, and helps them further their strengths

and cope with challenges they face within society (Gosine & Islam, 2014; Yosso, 2005).

Sriskandarajah (2019) examined how youth from diverse and socioeconomically marginalized 'priority neighborhoods' in Toronto engage with peers and utilize community resources. Parallel to the findings of Gosine and Islam (2014), Sriskadarajah (2019) emphasizes the importance of connection and belonging among racialized youth living in low-income neighborhoods. Sriskadarajah (2019) argues that one's neighborhood is a site for navigating and nurturing relationships with peers, families, and friends. With a focus on sense of space, young people in Sriskadarajah's (2019) study acknowledged "their strong ethno-racial attachments and its importance in their daily lives" (p. 266). Similar to Gosine and Islam's findings, Sriskadarajah's study participants were able to create a sense of belonging and connection through shared racialized and classed identities. Due to the degree of diversity in the study participants' neighbourhoods young people identified feeling a level of connectedness which gave them the ability to traverse different settings and communities (Sriskadarajah, 2019).

Rigg, McNeish, Schadrac, Gonzalez and Tran (2019) explain that community programming is a vital component for young people to make connections and create safe spaces. Furthermore, Rigg et al. (2019) highlight how unsafe neighborhoods can be for young people due to violence and gang activity in the inner city of New York. Youth do not have access to safe spaces and are often kicked out of local parks for hanging around. This lack of safety necessitates community programs (Rigg et al., 2019). Community programming is used to give youth a place to go where they can avoid neighborhood violence and make connections with other young people. It is evident from the literature that marginalized youth deal with oppression and various forms of stigmatization as they navigate dominant societal structures and institutions. Young people find ways to cope with this through community resources, peer and

familial relationships and, where available, culturally appropriate, inclusive, and accessible, youth programs. Thus, research presents the need for youth programming, and the importance of programs and safe spaces for young people to minimize sources of stress, promote social connectedness, build social capital, and facilitate healthy psycho-social development.

Youth Programming

A review of the literature on youth day camps and youth programming more broadly revealed five major themes: job satisfaction of youth workers, psychological challenges experienced by counsellors, strategies individuals use when working with youth, the cultivation of social capital via youth programs, and neoliberal influences that guide youth programming. The literature revealed the importance of youth programming and how young people can benefit from various programs. Youth programs often have similar goals such as facilitating positive youth development, creating inclusive environments, helping young people connect with others, and fostering long lasting friendships. Though youth programs have numerous benefits for young people, minimal research has been conducted on individuals who run youth programs and how youth workers perceive the youth with whom they work. In fact, literature that explores the perceptions and job-related experiences of camp counsellors specifically is scarce. This section will provide an overview of recent research on day camps and day camp counsellors and will also offer a critical outlook on youth programs as well as the benefits of being in a youth work position.

Job Satisfaction of Youth Workers

It is evident from academic research that many youth workers feel that their job is both rewarding and challenging. For example, a study of the reasons why camp counsellors chose to work at camp for multiple years by Whitacare and Farmer (2013) found that most camp

counsellors returned to camp for many summers as they felt greatly connected to both campers and staff. This sense of connectedness, along with the work itself, left staff with a sense of ownership and empowerment (Whitacare & Farmer, 2013). Having a *sense of place* was also mentioned by counsellors, various times throughout interviews. The camp environment gave counsellors a place where they knew they would be accepted and feel a sense of belonging. Whitacare and Farmer also indicate that camp similarly provides youth with a place to go where they can forget about challenges in their lives and focus on learning and having fun. A sense of place and belonging applies to both campers and counsellors where counsellors leave camp with a feeling of affiliation to the organization for which they work (Whitacare & Farmer, 2013). As further evidence of their feeling of belonging, camp counsellors used words such as family, equality, community, and togetherness when discussing their experiences at camp. Having a strong bond with campers and fellow counsellors left staff wanting to return to camp for multiple summers. Though the job comes with many obstacles and hard days, counsellors were satisfied in their positions, with many describing their job as the best job they have ever had (Whitacare & Farmer, 2013).

The literature on day camps tends to focus on how camp benefits young people in a plethora of ways. Bialeschki, Henderson and Dahowski (1998) argue that camp directors frequently focus on the impact camp has on youth. Despite this being important, the researchers convey that it may be worth camp directors' time to focus on the good that camp does for counsellors and staff. As Whitacare and Farmer (2013) explain, the well-being and happiness of staff has implications for the quality and efficacy of the camping experience for youth, as well as whether counsellors return for consecutive summers. Echoing Whitacare and Farmer (2013), Bialeschki, Henderson and Dahowski (1998) highlight the positive impact that camp had on

staff. Focus group interviews revealed that counsellors felt camp provided them with positive personal and professional outcomes. These positive outcomes included giving staff the opportunity to develop leadership skills, a heightened appreciation for diversity, improved interpersonal and teamwork skills, the capacity to be a good role model, along with the cultivation of other worthwhile skills and aptitudes (Bialeschki, Henderson & Dahowski, 1998). Adding to Whitacare and Farmer's (2013) research, Bialeschki, Henderson and Dahowski (1998) discuss how camp helped counsellors to be more aware of social issues and the difficult lives that some campers have, "for many, staff relationships raised awareness of social issues that influenced the lives of their campers" (p. 28). One participant stated that camp is about "giving the kids a week of just fun and something to keep them going because a lot of things in society today bring them down" (p. 28).

Developing strong relationships with campers and other staff left counsellors feeling more cognizant of the social realities that influence the lives of campers (Bialeschki, Henderson & Dahowski, 1998). Counsellors in Bialeschki, Henderson and Dahowski's study documented how counsellors felt it was their job to make a difference in children's lives, to give them a positive experience and a place where they could go to forget the challenges they may be facing at home, in school, or in their communities.

Not only does the camp experience motivate counsellors to come back for multiple summers, DeGraaf and Glover (2003) found that camp had a long-term positive impact on the lives of staff members. Similar to the Bialeschki, Henderson and Dahowski (1998) study, DeGraaf and Glover's (2003) research participants explained how, as camp counsellors, they wanted to make a positive difference in the lives of youth. One of the main findings in DeGraaf and Glover's research was that working at camp gave counsellors the opportunity to cultivate

connections and gain experience that could assist them in achieving future goals. For example, many camp counsellors entered the teaching profession and needed experience working with children to do so. In addition, DeGraaf and Glover found that staff relationships contributed to a positive work experience and overall job satisfaction. Social relationships at camp blossomed into long-lasting friendships and other social benefits (DeGraaf & Glover, 2003). Reiterating a consistent theme in the camp literature, DeGraaf and Glover (2003) emphasize how camp gave counsellors a sense of place: “the physical nature of camp served as its own distinct world, separate and unique from the outside world” (p. 14). Participants in DeGraaf and Glover’s (2003) study also noted that they enjoyed being given the opportunity to be “alongside children at a significant point in their lives” (p. 15). Research into camp staff seemingly elicits the same responses from staff members. According to various studies, (Bialeschki, Henderson & Dahowski, 1998; Browne & Eloia, 2016), the relationships that youth workers cultivated with other staff members and the bonds they created with campers made them want to return to camp for multiple summers. Long-lasting friendships, bonds formed with campers, future opportunities, a sense of place, and belonging, all contribute to the satisfaction that camp counsellors feel in their positions.

Despite the plethora of positive experiences, camp staff also articulated what makes their job difficult. Wahl-Alexander, Richards and Washburn (2017) convey that camp counsellors often felt burnt out at times during their summer employment. Not only does burnout make a camp staff’s job more difficult, but burnout could also affect experiences for campers and the personal lives of staff (Wahl-Alexander, Richards & Washburn, 2017). Wahl-Alexander, Richards and Washburn define burn out as a syndrome that occurs when an individual is exhausted emotionally and physically as well as experiencing “prolonged levels of stress” (p.

75). Camp counsellors who feel drained and exhausted in their positions can start to exhibit behaviours associated with depersonalization. Staff who are experiencing depersonalization tend to be less focused, unempathetic and have pessimistic attitudes at their workplace (Wahl-Alexander, Richards & Washburn, 2017). In addition to depersonalization, burnout can decrease an individual's satisfaction in their position, job performance, motivation, as well as an "increased propensity to change professions (Wahl-Alexander, Richards & Washburn, 2017, p. 75). To limit the effects of burnout, Wahl-Alexander, Richards and Washburn (2017) emphasize resiliency, and how camp counsellors who exhibited high levels of resiliency presented lower levels of burnout. Staff who were resilient only experienced burnout for short periods of time, mainly at the beginning of the summer. Despite burnout being a large part of camp counsellors' lives, Wahl-Alexander, Richards and Washburn's research shows that resiliency aids in counsellors being satisfied with their positions at the end of the summer.

Psychological Challenges Faced by Camp Counsellors

Research literature has revealed that staff who work at camps are typically satisfied with their employment which tends to encompass positive experiences (Baker, 2018; Bialeschki & Henderson & Dahowski, 1998; DeGraaf & Glover, 2003). Research is lacking regarding the difficulties that camp counsellors face when working with youth. Baker (2018) conducted 38 in-depth interviews with camp counsellors and examined their personal narratives. Counsellors shared how they felt about their roles, and how they reflect on the challenges they face at camp. Counsellors frequently felt that camp was its own world, where they had to quickly make friends, and belong in the camp environment. For example, a participant in Baker's (2018) study explained, "I'm shy, so camp wasn't fun for me. I wasn't outgoing enough to be a favourite" (p. 35). Making friends with other counsellors at camp came easier for some than for others. In

addition to challenges with fitting in and making friends, counsellors also struggled to find time for themselves. Specifically, at overnight camps, counsellors are expected to work around the clock supervising children and have a lack of personal time (Baker, 2018). Day camps differ from overnight camps as counsellors are often expected to sleep in the same cabins as their campers. Day camp counsellors work somewhere between 7 am-6 pm depending on the specific site. Day camp staff do not have to sleep in the same place as the children and are off every weekend. Overnight camp staff reported feelings of social isolation, a lack of private time when working, as well as the need to feel accepted in the camp community (Baker, 2018). Camp counsellors are responsible for the everyday care, safety, and well-being of campers within timespans varying from days to several weeks. Counsellors often feel stressed as there is immense pressure placed on them to take care of youth and promote healthy development and behaviours. Camp staff also felt it was their responsibility to make campers feel that they belong at camp even if campers' sense of belonging was influenced by variables beyond the counsellor's control (Baker, 2018).

In addition to making every day feel special for campers, camp counsellors felt pressure to fit in with other staff members. Issues related to fitting in left some counsellors feeling socially isolated (Baker, 2018). Baker (2018) discusses a pressing issue that other literature neglects, specifically the idea that counsellors felt they deserved higher wages and more privacy in exchange for the constant demands of supervision and responsibility it takes to care for young people 24 hours a day. In addition, staff felt that they were undervalued, and their achievements were not celebrated (Baker, 2018). As Baker (2018) explains, "Camp managers call on counsellors to act as a camper's friend, parent, therapist, and teacher" (Baker, 2018 p. 29). Baker (2018) mentions that camp counsellors are often not significantly older than the campers and are

“expected to facilitate personalized opportunities for campers to gain skills and improve self-concepts through positive and meaningful camp experiences” (p. 29). These responsibilities could cause counsellors to feel burnt out and overwhelmed with the numerous roles they must perform.

Among other difficulties, camp counsellors must also ensure youth who are attending camp are enjoying their time, learning new things, and are engaged. Engagement is described as “a state of being fully present and as an overall sense of deep connection to the given context” (Browne & D’Eloia, 2016, p. 7). The purpose of Brown and D’Eloia’s (2016) study was to understand the engagement of camp staff with their roles, and how this enabled them to carry out their roles more effectively. Brown and D’Eloia’s (2016) study participants completed a questionnaire and daily journals about their camp experiences. Focus groups were also conducted, and job engagement was the focal point of discussion. Questions revolved around, “what it feels like when staff are engaged, what factors help and prevent camp staff from feeling engaged in their jobs” (Brown & D’Eloia, 2016 p. 10). Browne and D’Eloia (2016) found that camp counsellors who are more engaged when working with youth are more likely to create beneficial outcomes and quality experiences for young campers. Camp counsellors’ personal, physical and emotional health may all be aspects that limit or support their abilities to be fully engaged in their role (Brown & D’Eloia, 2016). Something as small as not getting enough sleep the night before camp can influence a counsellors’ engagement with their campers the next day. Not only does a counsellor’s satisfaction with their job suffer, but the experiences of campers can suffer as well.

Staff in Brown and D’Eloia’s (2016) study felt as if participation was a large factor contributing to engagement. Staff reported that if they were continually participating in activities,

they felt more energized and engaged in programming (Brown & D'Eloia, 2016). In addition to participation, making worthwhile connections with campers also led counsellors to engage with youth at greater and more productive levels (Brown & D'Eloia, 2016). While meaningful connections boost engagement with youth, physical and emotional wellness are two factors that lowered counsellor engagement (Brown & D'Eloia, 2016). Lack of sleep, not feeling physically well, or being emotionally drained all contributed to counsellors feeling disengaged during their day (Brown & D'Eloia, 2016). Another difficulty experienced by counsellors included dealing with challenging camper behaviour and coming up with new and creative programming all summer (Brown & D'Eloia, 2016). All of these factors contribute to burnout among camp staff.

Strategies for Working Effectively with Youth

Camp literature often emphasizes the importance of camp and how youth can benefit from engaging in various activities. Plenty of studies discuss how youth programming has positive outcomes for children, especially those who are labeled “at-risk”. Nabors, Hines and Monnier (2008) discuss the use of incentives when working with youth, particularly those from troubled or marginalized backgrounds. They examined a rewards-based summer camp where bracelets were used to promote positive behaviours and social skills in youth experiencing homelessness. Youth who are homeless experience an increased risk for behavioural issues in school and academic underachievement (Nabors, Hines & Monnier, 2008). According to Nabors, Hines and Monnier, the incentive-based program may be beneficial to homeless youth and could promote healthy ways to cope for children. For the incentive-based program, rewards were given out to youth who earned bracelets over a weekly period. Bracelets were given to children who exhibited “good behaviour.” Children who received a lot of bracelets (between 50-60) were able to choose from the expensive prizes and children who only received a few bracelets

(approximately 20) would choose from the least expensive prizes. With the implementation of the program, parents found that if their child received more bracelets at camp, they exhibited fewer outbursts and behavioural issues (Nabors, Hines & Monnier, 2008).

Incentive programming is hailed by other researchers as an effective strategy for camp staff to promote positive behaviours at camp. In contrast to the incentive-based approach documented by Nabors, Hines and Monnier (2008), Whitley, Forneris and Barker (2015) advocate for a more holistic outlook to camp counselling, known as the positive youth development approach. Whitley, Forneris and Barker (2015) outline the benefits of the positive youth development approach. A holistic approach is used in a way that helps youth “cultivate their talents, strengths and interests (Whitley, Forneris & Barker, 2015, p. 409). The positive youth development approach, “targets youth living in underserved communities, where there is a deficiency of services” (Whitley, Forneris & Barker, 2015, p. 410). A positive youth development approach when working with disadvantaged youth is important as these young people are often facing economic, environmental, and cultural barriers. Barriers can lead youth to experience unhealthy developmental outcomes (Whitley, Forneris & Barker, 2015). Thus, taking on an approach that works to cultivate all children’s strengths and assets could be beneficial when working with underserved communities (see also Yosso, 2005).

Similar to Whitley, Forneris and Barker’s (2015) research, Patel, Liddell and Ferreira (2018) examined how overall positivity, whether it be through language, thoughts or actions, could lead to youth feeling better about themselves. The “Positive Action program” is used in a variety of settings such as school and camps. The program is designed to limit negative behaviours such as bullying and violence and bring forth feelings of self-awareness (Patel, Liddell & Ferreira, 2018). Positive actions also involve the modeling of positive relationships

between adults and young people which is often exhibited in summer camp programs (Patel, Liddell & Ferreira, 2018). As found in other camp research, the aspect of having a safe space is also important when adopting a positive action program (Patel, Liddell & Ferreira, 2015, 525). Camps are “committed to the development of intentional practices with the goal of effecting positive developmental outcomes for children who participate in camp programs” (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2016 p. 442). Allen, Cox, and Cooper (2016) explain that positive developments can include enhanced self-esteem, increased confidence, better social relationships, and improved physical and cognitive skills.

One of the most worthwhile outcomes from attending summer camp is the relationships that are fostered between staff and campers (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2016). Regarding strategies working with youth, counsellors in Allen, Cox, and Cooper (2016) study explained that creating a safe space for campers regularly enhanced experiences and positive development in campers. In addition, relationship building was found to be an important aspect of camp counsellors’ youth work (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2016). A strong bond between campers and counsellors makes campers want to actively participate in programming, further limiting problem behaviours (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2016). Having a strong bond with campers often led to an understanding among youth that counsellors act with campers’ best interests in mind (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2016). Positive relationships with campers, creating a safe space and participating in activities were all reported as ways to make the work experience more enjoyable and serve as effective strategies when working with youth. (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2016). In all, according to much of the research literature, working with young people to cultivate their strengths, exuding positivity, and creating safe spaces all work towards positive youth development in a variety of settings.

Youth Programs as Vehicles for Building Social Capital

As much of the research literature cited above conveys, a key benefit of youth programs is the cultivation of social capital. As defined by Putnam (2000), social capital “refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). An individual can cultivate social capital within *or* outside of their specific community. The two main forms of social capital include *bridging* and *bonding* social capital. Bridging social capital enhances one’s connections to social resources outside of their given community while bonding social capital brings together similar kinds of people (Barman-Adhikari, Bowen, Bender, Brown & Rice, 2016; Baylis, Gong & Wang, 2018; Claridge, 2018; Putnam, 2000). Claridge (2018) explains that bridging and bonding social capital can be looked at as different types of trust. For example, bridging can be seen as trust that is earned from others beyond one’s milieu while bonding social capital can be trust that is ascribed. Trust is generated through the creation of reciprocal relationships. Bonding social capital encompasses relationships within one’s existing community while bridging social capital creates ties to individuals and networks outside one’s social circle. Bridging social capital can be referred to as a way for individuals to ‘get ahead’ while bonding social capital is good for ‘getting by’ (Putnam, 2000).

Bonding social capital includes relationships that one has with individuals of similar background or those who have comparable interests (Claridge, 2018; Putnam, 2000). These relationships are usually with family members, close friends and neighbors, work colleagues, and people involved in the same activist or civic pursuits. Bonding social capital exists when individuals are closely involved with one another and see each other frequently (Claridge, 2018; Putnam, 2000). As Putnam (2000) illustrates, “[e]xamples of bonding social capital include

ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups, and fashionable country clubs" (p. 22).

In contrast to bonding capital, bridging social capital exists between individuals who may or may not share the same interests and have "contrasting social identities" (Claridge, 2018, p. 3). Claridge (2018) explains that though friendships constitute bonding social capital, they can also act as bridging social capital. Friendships can exist between individuals with differing socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds which could, in turn, "provide access to information and other groups or individuals not previously known to the other" (Claridge, 2018, 3). Bridging social capital can be beneficial as it gives people the ability to learn about different communities that are unlike their own. Differing groups can exchange information that may be useful to them personally, opening more networks and opportunities (Claridge, 2018; Putnam, 2000).

It is evident from the literature that youth programming can be a vessel for building both bonding and bridging social capital. Often in youth work, adult figures make meaningful relationships with the youth with whom they work. A common goal is to better the lives of young people while giving them a space that is fun and free of judgement. Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins (2005) explain that youth benefit from making relationships with various adults that exist outside of their immediate family and social circle. Not only do these relationships promote healthy adolescent development but they also "can bridge the youth-adult divide" (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005, p. 42). Healthy relationships with adults through youth programming could aid in the elimination of the preconceived notion that young people are up to no good. Youth programs link young people with a community of adults that could provide them with resources, perspectives, and learning opportunities to which they might not otherwise have access to (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005). Moreover, youth programs bring together different

groups of children who likely would not have interacted with each other outside of the program. Like other research studies on youth programming, Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins (2005) explain the importance that youth programs have on social development. Adult figures serve as both role models and mentors for young people, helping them to cultivate interpersonal, social, academic, and athletic skills (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005, 43).

Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins (2005) found young people believed that adult figures often dismissed their abilities, deeming them as incompetent and delinquent. Young people found adults to be dismissive and typically not inclined to take them seriously. The youth program Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins studied was called “Connecting with Adults”. As part of this program, youth participated in activities with adults whom they found easy to relate to, hence changing their perceptions of adults generally (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005). Furthermore, “although adults had greater knowledge than youth, they were willing to share it and they did not use it as a way to establish their superiority or dominance” (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005, p. 49). In a similar research study, Grossman and Bulle (2006) highlighted the importance of relationships between adults and young people. Adults are important as they can bridge opportunities for young people, urging them to reach their full potential by way of different experiences (Grossman & Bulle, 2006). Thus, through youth programs, young people were able to build social capital by creating meaningful relationships with adults.

Staff, as well as youth, have the opportunity to build social capital while at summer camp. Whitacare and Famer’s (2013) study emphasizes how camp aids in the creation of strong bonds between counsellors and other staff, as well as counsellors and campers. The bonds made with other counsellors often result in bonding social capital where counsellors share the same interest of helping and creating a positive experience for children. Bridging social capital also

exists within these relationships as camp counsellors often do not know each other when initially hired. Each staff member brings something different to the workplace and has various connections that may differ from other counsellors. Individuals who are employed as camp counsellors frequently want to work with youth at some point in their future. Working at camp can give young people the chance to gain social capital through the cultivation of social ties with other youth workers along with the opportunity to gain valuable work experience.

Neoliberal Influences on Youth Programming

As defined by Hillman (2016), “[n]eoliberalism comprises a set of economic theories, policies, and political practices that seek to liberalize free markets through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs, and cuts to social and health services” (p. 366; see also Kennelly, 2011; Raddon & Harrison, 2015). Neoliberalism shifts the focus from social services such as health care and education and creates “favourable conditions for business” (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 137). With a focus on expanding wealth and maximizing profit, the amelioration of social inequalities is deprioritized under neoliberalism.

In addition, neoliberalism “operates through discourses, institutions and practices that construct ‘truth’ such that citizens conduct themselves in a manner that serves the needs and interests of the state” (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 138). Neoliberalism strives to produce citizens that will be responsible, hardworking individuals. Individuals who fail under neoliberalism are blamed for their lack of responsibility when social factors such as structural inequalities are not taken into consideration. Thus, those who are economically successful under neoliberalism will reap the benefits of appearing to deserve their success, while those who do not will be deemed responsible for their failure. Part of my objective in this research project is to examine the relationship between neoliberalism, youth programming, and common youth work

practices. In regards to youth programming, neoliberal values are often embedded within program agendas (Gordon, 2013; Hillman, 2016). Through mentorship programs, young people are given guidance and tips on how to navigate various social settings. The aim is to create responsible adults who validate prevailing structures and the dominant meritocratic ideology by finding a job and contributing to the capitalist regime.

There exists a body of scholarship that critically considers the ways in which neoliberal ideology has shaped youth programming in Canada and the USA. Hillman (2016), for example, examines how youth mentorship essentially supports neoliberal hegemonic values associated with patriarchy, gender role expectations and negative youth stereotypes. Youth programs are often used to promote healthy development and focus on their future in terms of readiness for employment and focus on education. Hillman (2016) explains that “normative youth development is frequently contrasted with a narrative of troubled, delinquent, and criminalized youth as a phenomenon stemming from the absence of caring and responsible role models” (p. 369). Thus, youth programming is needed to promote positive development, especially with mentorship programs.

Hillman (2016) explains that mentorships deliver the message that youth finally have a responsible and caring adult around them and are likely to mirror their behaviour as they grow up. These programs aim to support successful development of youth. Hillman (2016) argues that youth turn into “young neoliberal citizen-subjects” (p. 376). Youth who participate in these programs are conforming to neoliberal values, demonstrating behaviours that the program is designed to promote. As the literature suggests, youth programs are designed to give children a space where they can be themselves and build social capital. While these are important objectives, young people are also expected to be on their best behaviour, which often entails

embracing neoliberal values and expectations and being subjected to meritocratic incentive-based programming.

Positive youth development has been an ongoing theme throughout youth work literature. Hillman (2016) suggests that there is “an additional agenda being fulfilled” (p. 365). The additional agenda involves youth conforming to values that may not align with their personal feelings and beliefs simply because they are in a program with a trustworthy adult. Hillman (2016) explains that neoliberal values that are emphasized in youth programming can be problematic as they “lead to an overemphasis on individualized models of development and a disregard for widespread structural inequalities” (p. 365). In other words, neoliberalism generates citizens who pursue success in a modern economy by way of *individual* talent, initiative and perseverance while fostering the illusion of unbridled equality of opportunity (Hillman, 2016). In this vein, it is quite often the case in mentorship programs that a responsible young adult is essentially teaching a young person how to be a model citizen who needs only rely on their individual capacities.

Youth programs’ targeting of marginalized communities can be attributed to the idea that these communities need assistance in raising respectful neoliberal citizens and that marginalized youth may be incapable of succeeding on their own without the guidance of mentors who subscribe to the ‘right values’. Moreover, “the personal qualities and attributes the programs desire to instill in young people are narrow in scope and in support of capitalistic corporate agendas” (Hillman 2016, p. 376). Though youth programming does have its benefits, often there is an underlying influence that needs to be thought about critically to fully understand a program’s purpose.

Gordon (2013) corroborates Hillman's critical outlook when he argues that youth programs' mission is informed by a broader hegemonic outlook. Gordon (2013) examines youth gardening empowerment programs and looks at the programs as sites of "poverty governance" (p. 107). In Hillman's (2006) discussion, marginalized youth are constructed as young people in need of saving through mentorship programs, while Gordon (2013) explains that youth living in poverty who attend these programs are viewed as individuals who make poor choices and "lack personal responsibility" (p. 108). Similarly, to Hillman (2016), Gordon (2013) discusses how youth programs implement "governance practices". These practices put the onus on youth and the empowerment program is deemed a 'fix' (p. 109). These fixes involve teaching youth valuable life skills, emphasizing responsibility, self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism (Gordon, 2013).

Echoing Hillman's (2016) examination of youth mentorships, Gordon (2013) explains that youth in poverty are viewed as a group that can ultimately be fixed through youth empowerment programs. The overall goal is to empower youth and make them the best citizens they can be, which ultimately means encouraging them to assimilate to neoliberal values. Gordon (2013) notes how the youth gardening program is selective when choosing participants, tending to prioritize youth who are "capable of success" and eliminating "desperate youth" who do not fare well in the program (p. 112). The program gravitates towards youth "who are ready to make a change in their lives" and deems those who are not as incapable (Gordon, 2013, p. 112). Such an outlook individualizes the challenges and disengagement of young people, drawing attention away from the structural systemic factors that shape their realities. The youth empowerment programs examined in Gordon's (2013) study demonstrates the need to assess youth programs from a critical lens. A deeper look into youth programming could reveal hegemonic influences

that may not be entirely congruent with the identities and lived experiences of marginalized youth. Thus, resulting in blaming young people for failing to achieve neoliberal ideals that are out of reach due to structural inequalities.

Theoretical Framework: “Multiple Worlds” and “Community Cultural Wealth”

My goal with this research is to explore the perspectives of day camp counsellors and their perceptions of the young people they work with. To theorize my substantive topic, my MA thesis will draw upon the “multiple worlds” model of Phelan et al. (1991) and critical race theorist Tara Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth. More specifically, the multiple world model developed by Phelan et al. (1991) and Yosso’s (2005) theory of community cultural wealth will be used to discern how YMCA day camp counsellors understand the transitions young people make between their home communities and the camp, the programming measures counsellors employ to smooth this transition, and the extent to which counsellors recognize and work with the strengths and assets that youth possess.

Phelan et al. (1991) and Yosso (2005) provide insight into the ways marginalized youth experience and traverse school. I see YMCA day camps as comparable to schools in that both are dominant institutional settings that operate outside of young people’s milieu of community, family, and peer groups. A counsellor, the individual leading a group of youth, can be compared to a teacher in that they are instructing, mentoring, and enforcing rules in a setting that is situated within the broader, mainstream society. Campers have programs planned for them throughout the day, as they would in school and are instructed to listen and follow the rules that the counsellor sets out. The rules and values emphasized within the camp setting may not be entirely congruent with the values and morals of the young campers’ communities and families. Hence, the model

of multiple worlds and community cultural wealth can be examined within the context of my research as the school setting is similar to that of day camp.

Phelan et al. (1991) model of multiple worlds studies the relationships between the various 'worlds' in the lives of young people, specifically between their "family, peer and school worlds" (Phelan et al. 1991 p. 224). Drawing on their qualitative ethnographic research findings at a series of Northern California high schools, Phelan et al. (1991) examine how relationships between multiple worlds can influence the ways in which students engage with school and the challenges they face transitioning between various worlds. The researchers take a particular interest in the strategies young people employ to navigate between different worlds. To understand the different challenges diverse groups of students faced transitioning between worlds, Phelan et al. (1991) developed a typology consisting of four categories: type I: congruent worlds/smooth transitions, type II: different worlds/boundary crossings managed, type III: different worlds/boundary crossings hazardous, type IV: borders impenetrable/boundary crossings insurmountable" (p. 228). The first type involves students who can navigate through various worlds easily with minimal complications. This often includes students whose home life and school life are similar in terms of norms and values (Phelan et al. 1991). Type II students are those whose worlds of school and community may not be harmonious with one another due to differences pertaining to culture, socioeconomic status or religion. Students who fall into this category find it somewhat challenging to cross the boundary between their communities and school, but generally manage to navigate school and fare well academically. A study participant named Trinh, for example, changes the way she acts in order to be accepted within the home and behaves differently in her peer world so that she is accepted by friends (Phelan et al. 1991). Type III students find transitioning difficult as their worlds of school and community tend to be

disparate. Phelan et al. (1991) explain that boundary crossing for these students often causes “friction and unease” (p. 237). Students who fall into this category experience school as markedly dissimilar to their family and peer groups, thereby making school a difficult context to traverse (Phelan et al. 1991). Finally, Type IV students perceive their worlds of community and school as highly dissonant owing to differing norms, standards, expectations and beliefs. Hence, navigating between these spheres can be near impossible (Phelan et al. 1991). Type IV students are most likely to be pushed out of school without graduating.

Tara Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth is useful when considering how we might bridge the multiple worlds in the lives of youth. Gosine and Tabi (2016) make a connection between the work of Yosso and Phelan et al. when they note that “Yosso draws attention to the strengths and assets that students labeled ‘at risk’ (i.e. Phelan et al. Type III and IV students) cultivate within their families and communities” (p. 450). Yosso (2005) explains that students have various strengths that are often ignored by authority figures in mainstream institutional settings, in this case, teachers. Echoing Phelan et al. (1991) account of the challenges many young people face crossing the boundary between community and school, Yosso (2005) argues that “deficit thinking” is prevalent within the school system in that minority students, their families and communities are often blamed for issues that a student may have at school (p.75). Students may struggle to navigate the different worlds in their lives as their efforts are often undermined by educators who are often oblivious to the unique strengths, resources, and assets that they bring to the classroom and tend to view their communities as pathological or deficient.

Phelan et al. (1991) discuss how teachers’ low expectations often lead to the blaming of students for their academic struggles, shining a negative light on their personal character,

families, and communities. Yosso (2005) draws on critical race theory to spotlight the distinctive strengths that marginalized youth possess. Furthermore, Yosso (2005) discusses the assets and qualities produced within marginalized youths families and communities, that enable such young people to foster a positive sense of identity amidst oppressive circumstances to navigate the dominant society. She problematizes “white middle-class communities as the standard against which all others are judged” (p. 82).

Yosso identifies six dimensions of community cultural wealth. The first is aspirational capital, this refers to an individual’s hopes for the future, even if there are obstacles in the way. Aspirational capital is rooted in resiliency, where individuals can dream of future possibilities despite present circumstances (Yosso, 2005). The second is linguistic capital, which encompasses one’s intellect and social skills that are attained through situations involving communication in more than one language (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, linguistic capital reflects how students of colour have various communication skills. The third is familial capital, which is the “cultural knowledges nurtured among familia that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005 p. 79). Familial capital refers to more than just the family, expanding to one’s community and extended family. The fourth is social capital, which involves networks of individuals and community resources (Yosso, 2005). Social capital provides individuals with support which is integral in navigating through society’s institutions (Yosso, 2005). While Yosso does not employ this term, the intra-communal social capital to which she refers is bonding social capital. The fifth is navigational capital, navigation capital refers to the ways in which individuals operate through social institutions (Yosso, 2005). The last dimension of community cultural wealth is resistant capital, which refers to the strengths and skills individuals “fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality” (Yosso,

2005 p. 80). Using a critical race lens assists in understanding the various forms of cultural wealth within marginalized communities and the need for educators and youth workers to recognize, value and work with these qualities and assets (Yosso, 2005).

Gosine and Tabi (2016) discuss hip hop as an example of community cultural wealth in the lives of many young people that educators can use to bridge their worlds of school and community. According to the authors, the neoliberal, individualist disposition of mainstream schooling stands in contrast to the relatively collectivist orientation of marginalized communities, making school a somewhat alienating environment for many poor, minoritized young people (such as Type III and IV students in Phelan et al. schematic). Gosine and Tabi (2016) argue that hip hop has served as a vehicle by which many marginalized young people build a positive sense of identity and speak out about the various forms of oppression they experience. This makes hip hop pedagogy an example of cultural wealth that educators can use to ease the boundary-crossing between students' communities and school and make schooling more meaningful and relevant to marginalized youth (Gosine & Tabi, 2016).

The work of Phelan et al. (1991) and Yosso (2005) informed my research pertaining to camp counsellors' perceptions of youth and the strengths that they possess. I envision the YMCA camp as another "world" in the lives of the young participants to which they must transition from their other worlds of community, family, peer groups, and school. Do day camp counsellors consider the challenges the young campers might face in crossing the boundary between the camp and their other worlds? Do they perceive the values, social capital, and goals promoted at the camp as congruent with those of the young people's families and communities? What programmatic strategies do counsellors employ to make crossing the boundary smoother for the youth participants? To what extent do these programmatic measures draw upon the

unique qualities and strengths that young campers bring from their families and communities?

These are some of the questions I explored in this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This thesis aims to explore YMCA camp counsellors' perceptions of the young people they work with in order to understand the potential social and developmental benefits of youth work in this context. Several broad research objectives guided this inquiry. First, I sought to spotlight the social and developmental benefits that both counsellors and campers gain from the camping experience. Second, I intended to capture and understand how YMCA day camp counsellors perceive the youth with whom they work and understand counsellors' experiences working with marginalized populations. Third, I set out to learn how counsellors understand and conceptualize the strengths and assets that young people bring to the camp experience. And finally, I was interested in why counsellors chose to work with youth and the youth work philosophy that guided their work.

When first thinking about my research topic in the beginning stages, I recognized the importance of capturing the viewpoints of camp counsellors. I wanted to do so as research regarding camp counsellors' experiences is lacking, and I wanted to provide insight into the rewarding aspects of working with youth, along with the challenges. I also wanted to shed light on the significant impact that camp counsellors can potentially have on the lives of young people. Hence, the original intent was to undertake an exploratory, qualitative study based on in-depth, one-on-one interviews with individuals who have recently worked as YMCA day-camp counsellors. Narrowing down the population I wanted to study, I knew as a former YMCA day camp counsellor that I could relate to many of the same challenges, joys, and benefits that members of my study population experience.

This chapter will examine the rationale and justification for utilizing qualitative research methods, by way of semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, I will discuss how I contacted

participants, as well as reflexivity and my place as a researcher. In all, by way of qualitative inquiry, I illuminate the benefits, challenges, and some of the lingering systemic inequities and biases of youth programming within the context of an increasingly diverse and unequal society.

Qualitative Social Research

As a researcher I wanted to understand camp counsellors' experiences, thoughts, feelings, practice philosophies as well as their perceptions of youth and how they dealt with various conflicts that arose when working with young people. To gather rich narratives, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. Flick (2007) explains that qualitative research is "interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study" (p. 2). Given my study objectives, the utilization of qualitative research was critical for the success of my project as I needed to elicit camp counsellors' direct experiences and accounts of their time working as YMCA day camp counsellors. My qualitative research is underpinned by a constructivist interpretivist perspective, as "proponents of these persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwadt, 1998, p. 221). My study requires YMCA day camp counsellors to discuss their own accounts, how they perceived their job, various challenges they had, why they chose youth work, along with other related themes. I wanted to understand camp counsellors' lived experiences, as articulated by them. Furthermore, my qualitative research approach can be characterized as an exploratory study "[t]he focus [of which] is naturally driven by the specific research questions" (Elliot & Timulak, 2005 p. 151). My specific research questions are as follows: (1) what social and developmental benefits do counsellors and campers derive from the camping experience? (2) What broader influences shape camp counsellors' perceptions of what constitutes a positive or beneficial camp experience for young people? (3)

Do YMCA camp counsellors strive to transform the young people with whom they work or are they able to recognize and work with the cultural wealth that diverse youth bring to the camp context? In addition to interviews, a reflexive approach was taken to further support and contextualize findings.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview method was employed. This enabled me, as a researcher, to elicit in-depth and thoroughly elucidated narratives. Open-ended, in-depth interviewing also granted the flexibility to reassess and adjust the chosen focus if the interview happened to go in a different direction, thereby allowing for an emergent research design (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). If certain responses needed further clarification, or secondary questions needed to be asked, the semi-structured interview method gave me the ability to do so.

As an insider, it was quite easy to recruit study participants. Participants had to be currently or recently employed with the YMCA as a day camp counsellor. Following approval of Brock University's Research Ethics Board (REB), purposive sampling was utilized, as individuals were selected based on selected criteria (Lune & Berg, 2017). In addition, I also utilized snowball sampling, where participants guide the researcher to certain people who may be useful for their study, enabling them to make further connections (Lune & Berg, 2017). Fortunately, I was able to connect with the YMCA summer day camp administrative coordinator. I previously worked with the administrative coordinator for 2 years when we both started out as camp counsellors. I sent her a text, inquiring if she could possibly send out a mass email to YMCA day camp counsellors. The email explained that counsellors could reach me by e-mail if they were interested in participating in the research study, with no obligation to respond if they were uninterested.

I had worked with many counsellors whose contact information I still possessed. I sent some of my old co-workers a text asking if they would be interested; some said yes, while some declined. I re-assured those interested in participating that they could drop out of the study at any time and could cancel their interview if they decided they did not want to be a part of my study, in which case the data they provided to that point would not be used. Every participant was glad to help and had no issues throughout the interview process. Many of them thanked me after, stating that it was fun to reflect on their experiences working with children at the YMCA.

As outlined in Chapter two, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on parental satisfaction of summer camps and how summer camps better the lives of youth. But there is minimal research from the camp counsellors' perspective. Summer camps are a large part of a child's year, yet camp counsellors rarely get recognized for their hard work, as teachers spend most of the year working with youth whereas summer camp staff only work for 3 months. As a camp counsellor, I knew that I had a lot of thoughts and feelings regarding my position as a youth worker, and how I influence children's lives in a short period of time. I knew that it was important to interview camp counsellors as the literature focusing on this specific population was relatively scant. As an insider, I also knew a lot of people in upper-level positions in the summer camp world. Despite this, it was critical for me to hear from the people who worked directly with children, not from those who supervise or manage staff. My research can add to the limited academic literature that focuses on camp counsellors and their contributions to youth work as a whole.

Interviews varied in length, the shortest interview being 20 minutes, and the longest lasting 60 minutes. A total of eight camp counsellors were interviewed, two identified as male and six identified as female. Individual interviews were chosen as opposed to focus groups, as I

wanted each individual to discuss their experiences confidentially and not be influenced by potential groupthink biases. Whether they discussed a child they worked with, or their personal experiences, I did not want counsellors to hold back their thoughts or feelings. I also did not want my participants opinions swayed when hearing other participants' responses. To ensure the necessary topics were being covered, an interview guide was created to address various themes, while also leaving room for probes and the exploration of unanticipated themes that might emerge in the context of a conversation. The interviews were organized into thematic sections: opening/background questions, the YMCA's mission statement and value beads program, and lastly, youth work philosophy. Participants were reminded frequently that if a point came where they no longer wished to participate, they could drop out at any time. With the permission of study participants, each of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality and security, interview audio and transcripts were stored in a locked file/computer.

Data Collection and Analysis

Typical of qualitative inquiry, data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously as intertwined processes. After each interview, which I transcribed verbatim, I read the transcripts individually several times. After getting a good grasp on the information my participants provided, I started to code the interviews. I went through line by line noting important points in the margins. During this process, I utilized process coding which Saldana (2020) explains that "a code is applied each time the subtopic of the interview shifts, and the same codes can (and should) be used more than once if the subtopics are similar". When coding, I noted changes in topics, and wrote multiple codes when topics were similar. To categorize my codes, I "clustered the most seemingly alike things into the most seemingly appropriate groups"

as Saldana (2020) explains. After I clustered codes into appropriate groups, I proceeded to write out the codes in a word document. For each code, I included four to five quotations from participants' interview transcripts to ensure credibility. If I was unable to produce four to five quotations for a specific code, I considered the data a deviation from general observed patterns and contemplated its significance accordingly.

After coding the data, I analyzed how the codes fit together which led to the generation of themes. Gibson and Brown (2011) explain that “thematic analysis refers to the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships and differences across a data set” (p. 127). To generate themes, I examined the commonalities of my codes, “this typically involves finding ways to pool together all the examples from across a data set that can be categorized as ‘an example of ‘x’” (Gibson & Brown, 2011 p. 128). After, the themes were then narrowed down to what was most commonly found within the data (why youth work, the YMCA as a resource for low-income families, challenges faced by camp counsellors, the value beads program, appropriate behaviour, neoliberal role models, perceptions of home life, pathologizing campers and communities, strengths and assets of youth, social capital). As I collected and analyzed the data, I consulted frequently with my supervisor about the emerging themes. This process of consultation provided a sounding board for my emerging ideas and helped to counter any personal biases due to my insider status.

Reflexivity

“Reflexivity means the tendency critically to examine and analytically to reflect upon the nature of research and the role of the researcher in carrying out and writing up empirical work” (Elliot, 2005 p. 153) When adding my personal narratives into my research, it is critical to convey my positionality as a researcher and discuss reflexivity. Having awareness is critical so

that a researcher can connect on a different level with participants and the data being collected. Reflexivity is also vital as it gives the researcher insight on how to represent the particular group that they are researching (Elliot, 2005). I identify as a white middle-class female and many of the participants I interviewed disclosed a similar identity to my own. This eased building rapport and facilitated our dialogue in interviews, as their feelings towards their job and the young people they worked with were relatable. Participants who identified as male also had similar feelings towards youth work, but as a female, I lack male privilege and cannot relate as much to their work experiences. Conversing with my co-workers outside of my research, we would discuss how campers respect the male staff a little bit more than the female staff. From personal experience, there have been times where the children I was working with would not listen to me at all, especially the male children. Once a male staff came into the room and told them how they should behave, they listened right away. Comparably, I have been called by male staff who had troubles with female campers to talk with them and deal with their behaviour.

As a researcher who is also an insider, it is critical to recognize my pre-conceived notions of the camp counsellor position. Throughout the research process, I needed to stand back and evaluate what my participants were conveying without bringing in my experiences. By being forthcoming about my personal experiences and insider status and how this could influence data interpretation, I am heightening the trustworthiness of my study.

Social Location

As a researcher who has insider status, it is necessary to address my social location and the reasoning behind my choice to study camp counsellors. Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) explain, “It is important to highlight researchers’ motivations for conducting research and how one’s background and experiences impact this motivation” (p. 2). Working as a camp counsellor

for numerous years, I was always intrigued by the way camp counsellors dealt with various campers/situations. I wanted to know their motivations and why they chose to work with youth and how they perceived their positions and the children they worked with. I knew going into this research that I had preconceived notions about the camp experience, children, and other staff. Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) explain, “understanding our position, particularly in comparison to the social position of our participants, helps us to better understand the power relations imbued in our research and provides an opportunity to be reflexive about how to address this” (p. 2). My position as a camp counsellor was similar to participants, but it was critical for me to take a step back and understand my social location as a researcher. I strived to minimize personal input, and really hear and analyze what participants had to say. I approached this research reflexively and conveyed my positioning as both a camp counsellor and researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR: BEST JOB EVER?

“So, yeah. I would say it’s the best job you could ever have.” (Rose, study participant)

This chapter will examine the various reasons camp counsellors choose to work with youth, what the job entails, the challenges they face and how they conceptualize and address those challenges. Becoming a camp counsellor does not seem like a difficult job for people who have not worked in the camp environment. Youth work is often belittled and likened to babysitting, implying that it is easy work. Participants in this study know that this is not the case. From program planning, to supervision and conflict resolution, a lot goes into making the camp experience successful for all campers. The first theme that will be discussed in this chapter is the multiple motivations for taking on the job of a camp counsellor, how this job could work to benefit some staff in the future, and the benefits they derive from working with youth, particularly in a camp setting and for the YMCA. From building strong relationships with staff and campers, to working with diverse groups of children, participants spoke about their summers at camp in largely positive terms and explained why they returned to work for consecutive summers. I describe the litany of challenges that camp counsellors face, what tools they utilize when dealing with conflict, and what they do to overcome difficult scenarios. Finally, I highlight the ways in which camp counsellors conceptualize ‘bad’ camper behaviour along with their often-shortsighted perceptions of the families and communities of youth marginalized by race and class.

Why Youth Work?

Teachers, babysitters, early childhood educators, coaches and camp counsellors are all positions that involve dealing with difficult behaviours, complicated situations, little interaction with adults and, often, a low salary or wages. Despite this, plenty of individuals choose to work

in caregiving roles as opposed to retail, customer service, or other jobs. As an individual who has worked with youth for over six years, I often receive questions from peers and adults who do not work with youth. These questions are almost always along the lines of, “why do you choose to work with young people?” My answer is always the same: “Why wouldn’t you want to work with young people?” From personal experience, I often hear the same responses from other youth workers that I know. Throughout my research, it was evident that many camp counsellors had the same reasons as to why they loved working with youth. Most participants articulated their love for children and the desire they had to make an impact in the lives of young people. This is a common phenomenon among individuals who work with youth. In a qualitative study that explored why people pursuing a career in teaching chose that vocational path, Wadsworth (2001) found that teachers wanted to contribute to society while doing something that they loved. There were also similar responses among camp counsellors who took part in my research:

Rose: I think that’s why I stuck around with the Y for so long, I just loved this work, I loved the kids I loved the people that I worked with and I think that is one of the most impactful jobs that you could ever have in your life, um I’m sure that teachers feel a similar way because you get to work with these kids and kind of you know change their lives, change their perspectives.

Here, Rose even compares her feelings to that of a teacher and other individuals involved in youth work. Being able to make an impact in a child’s life was often a highlight for participants.

Luke: I love the children that I worked with and making a difference in their life.”

Hannah: “You can really change a kids life if you really inspire them and show them what its all about.

From the perspective of a camp counsellor, creating bonds with campers and staff is an important component of the camp experience. Often, counsellors will try and learn all they can about the children they are working with to gain and maintain trust as well as strengthen communication between campers and staff. These relationships are important to campers and counsellors.

Both counsellors and campers are given the opportunity to build social capital by interacting with new people and exploring new opportunities. From the camper perspective, children are making new acquaintances and developing skills they may not have had a chance to develop outside of the camp environment. As previously discussed, social capital enhances the lives of young people in many ways, and one of the main goals of counsellors is to help young people cultivate social capital. Friendship, support, and guidance are qualities camp counsellors strive to foster when creating relationships with campers in their care. In addition, campers often see their counsellors as role models or people that they can look up to. Having a positive role model and gaining social capital through relationships can be beneficial for young people, especially those in vulnerable situations (Putnam, 2000). Social capital can promote healthy relationships and positive youth development. As a camp counsellor, I also often heard from my older campers that they too wanted to be camp counsellors when they were old enough. Once I became aware of this, I would give these campers more opportunities to become leaders within their groups, teaching them tips and strategies for working with youth. This illustrates one of the benefits of social capital, being connected to an experienced camp counsellor and learning about what it would be like to have a job that they may want in the future.

Trust and good communication make for strong bonds between campers and counsellors, creating a successful and fun camp experience. Camp counsellors felt as if it was their job to be a reliable adult in their campers' life. Participants often mentioned wanting to create a safe space

for youth, where campers can have fun and feel comfortable discussing any issues they may be having. In addition, camp counsellors felt as if working with young people was exceptionally rewarding. People who work in occupations involving children frequently describe their job as rewarding and impactful (Schelbe et al, 2018; Bernard, 2010). Kidd, Miner, Walker and Davidson (2007) conducted a study where they interviewed individuals who worked with homeless youth. Youth workers reported that the experience of connecting with young people was worthwhile and satisfying, especially when youth were more reserved or harder to communicate within the beginning (Kidd et al, 2007). Camp counsellors in my study revealed similar experiences. Counsellors mentioned that seeing campers grow from the beginning to the end of camp was one of the most fulfilling parts of the job.

Luke: But I would say definitely the biggest reward on a more positive note is just working with the kids and seeing them grow and seeing them evolve and change over time.

In addition to the growth and evolution being rewarding, another participant conveyed that the tough days also left feelings of great reward.

Ian: I'd have such tough days, and then I would have such amazing days. But then it was almost more rewarding on the tough days because like, if it was tough on me, think about how tough it is on those kids on a daily basis.

Interestingly, Ian explains that though the job can be difficult on him, he cannot imagine how tough it may be for the children. Youth workers have many tough days during which they face a myriad of challenges including difficult behaviours, angry parents and periods of burnout, but still proclaim the love they have for children and the work they do.

During my time working at camp, I met a lot of people who had plans to become teachers, using camp as a means of acquiring experience for this career aspiration. Wanting to be a teacher is a common theme among individuals who work with children, especially in the camp setting.

Kelsey: I always wanted to be a teacher, so I knew that I needed experience to get into teachers' college so that's why I started working.

Ian: I always wanted to teach; I've wanted to teach my whole life. Um, teaching was really the main part of it.

Both participants explained that camp was essentially a job to gain experience working with youth. Despite this being the primary reason for choosing to work at camp, participants returned to camp for many summers explaining that they loved the kids and working at camp in general. In addition to the love for kids, and gaining valuable experiences for future career opportunities, camp counsellors felt that choosing the YMCA as their workplace was quite an easy decision. Participants explained that the YMCA is a reputable organization with admirable goals and values. One individual stated that they chose the YMCA as they believed it would look good on their resume. Furthermore, another participant, Rose, explained that the YMCA gave them a chance to work with a large staff team, and the opportunity to work with children from various backgrounds: "They placed the YMCA there for a reason because it was to make sure they were helping vulnerable communities."

Camp counsellors reported that building relationships with both campers and staff was one of the reasons why they chose to work with youth. Staff and campers can be in each other's company from morning to evening, for up to 10 weeks of the summer depending on the campers' enrolment. No matter the duration, camp counsellors strived to make connections with all

campers regardless of the amount of time the children were in their care. When examining youth work from the perspective of camp counsellors it is clear that individuals who choose youth work care greatly about the children with whom they work. They aim to make strong connections with campers and staff, while also teaching young people valuable skills and lessons.

YMCA: A Resource for Low Income Families

As previously discussed, YMCAs are often placed in low-income communities as they offer subsidized programs and relatively cheap options for childcare. Currently, for programs such as dance, parents who are not on subsidy are paying 10 dollars a month to have their child enrolled while subsidized children are paying six dollars a month. These prices are low considering that some parents pay hundreds of dollars monthly for extracurricular activities. The YMCA also offers a wide variety of programs, such as basketball, sports and games, dance, arts and crafts, science programs and much more. In addition to structured programming, the YMCA offers open gym times, where individuals with memberships can use the facilities to play basketball and meet other individuals while also getting out and engaging in some physical activity. Moreover, the YMCA offers teen nights, where any teen can use the facilities without a membership. This includes playing sports, joining a dance, music or art class, working out, using the pool, or simply meeting and hanging out with new people. Youth can also volunteer to help coordinate these events, gaining their community service hours. With teen nights, the YMCA is working towards bringing youth into a safe environment where they can interact and learn new skills whilst getting involved in their community. YMCA programs like teen night, provide youth with the opportunity to build positive and productive forms of social capital. Whether this

is done through meeting new people or learning a new skill, these initiatives give youth new experiences they may not have otherwise had.

In addition to these year-round programs, YMCA day camps can also be subsidized, meaning low-income families may receive a whole summer of camp for minimal or no cost. Receiving a full summer of camp for a low cost can help families who would otherwise be struggling for childcare. Participants in my study mentioned that this was something they admired about the YMCA. They appreciated that the YMCA gave children the ability to attend camp regardless of their familial income. When mentioning subsidized families, camp counsellors often assumed that children receiving subsidy likely came from problem families or rougher backgrounds. Evidently, this is not the case for a lot of families. Many children who grow up in low-income households have wonderful childhoods and have parents who provide for them as much as they can.

When discussing the downfalls of the camp counsellor position, one of my participants explained that the pay is not great, “many downfalls, um the pay, for real the pay”, Rory explains. Similar to Bialeschki et al. (1998) study, it was common among the other camp counsellors in my study to explain that despite being paid low wages, camp was worth every moment. Interacting with the campers and teaching them new skills was a rewarding part of the job that outweighed the downside of low pay.

While serving a lot of low-income families and community members, the YMCA is a charity dedicated to providing quality programs for all members. Through my research, I found that when camp counsellors discussed the YMCA serving low-income families, they would explain how they wanted to make an impact on children’s lives. Camp counsellors spoke about

how great the YMCA was for giving children the opportunity to come to camp and forget about what is going on at home. Kelsey explains what campers should expect when they come to camp,

That they don't have to worry about their external situations. Like they can come to camp knowing that they are going to have fun, that they're going to feel safe and included, and that's what I wanna worry about here. That they know that when they do come to camp, that's what they should expect.

Counsellors essentially viewed camp as an escape for children who have an unhappy, or rough home life. Giving children a space where they do not have to worry about what is going on outside of the camp environment. When talking to camp counsellors regarding what they believed campers were going through at home, they emphasized issues of poverty and parents who were struggling to make ends meet. Participants explained that certain campers would sometimes come to camp with little to no food, or primarily junk food for snacks and lunches. One staff mentioned a camper who disclosed to him that they had not eaten since dinner the previous night. From personal experience, hearing different stories from campers about what goes on in their home life can be upsetting, but it is important to recognize their struggles without pathologizing low-income communities. Campers may be from low-income families, but it does not mean that they need to be saved from their home situation while at camp. It is easy to associate low income, with extreme struggle, but to rethink disadvantage in these situations is imperative. Youth workers cannot properly support children if we are pathologizing their communities. Camp counsellors need to be supportive when it comes to caring for campers from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Children disclosing what is happening while they are at home is not as common as one may think, from my personal experience. As I have observed, it is common for counsellors to

assume that families are struggling without knowing their entire situation. Despite not often knowing what is going on in the home lives of campers, it is also important to recognize what daily life may be like for children. Rory explains, “we only have empathy for people once we know their story”. As a camp counsellor it is easy to get frustrated and ostracize campers when they are misbehaving, yet we do not necessarily know what they are dealing with on a daily basis at home or in their communities. “I can’t even imagine the stuff they go through” Rory conveys.

Though participants mentioned a lot of negative stereotypes (poverty, drug/alcohol abuse, neglect) associated with low-income communities, camp counsellors also explained how they found campers to be resilient. Ian explains, “they bring so much energy, they bring so much baggage as far as whether its positive or negative being from home”. He is explaining that regardless of what is going on at home, positive or negative, children are mostly high energy and ready to take on the day. Rory also gives a similar response when discussing children and their resiliency, “I think each camper really brings a different piece to camp. They bring life, and they bring so much energy and like that child youthfulness, they’re just excited and resilient, they’re so resilient”. Comparably, Rory and Ian both highlight how campers can demonstrate resiliency while at camp, by engaging and having fun with their friends and other staff. Children are able to let go of individual struggles and really enjoy the camp experience. Each participant at some point mentioned the love they had for making kids happy and the joy they felt when they were able to create a fun game or craft that all campers loved.

An interesting discussion surrounding the lives of children outside of camp revealed that camp counsellors felt that it was important to know about children’s life at home, but only under certain circumstances or situations. For example, participants did mention different issues they felt campers were dealing with at home, but these were often based on assumption, unless

disclosed by the child. Frequently, assumptions were based on the way the child was behaving, Hannah explains,

A lot of the time those kids that are more of the troubled kids, quote unquote, like the ones that are more violent or aggressive, you find out that they do have something causing that at home. There might be a bad divorce, or maybe their grandpa just died. It's just stuff like that, if you really understand and respect that, you can reason with them and say, I know you're going through something, you just need to communicate and not let it out like that kinda thing.

Hannah is explaining that a child misbehaving could be attributed to what is going on in their home life. Other participants also felt that this was the case for many of their campers. Luke explains a situation he had where a child was having a rough day. The camper was struggling to listen, was easily frustrated and simply did not want to be at camp. Luke then reveals what he found out about the child,

His parents had recently got divorced, and this was not from just my perception, but also talking to his mom and she told me that he had recently lost a family member and you could definitely tell that while the camper was at camp that summer, his mood was very very shaken and affected by that. He didn't wanna be there, he just wanted to spend time with his mom and be home. But she is a single parent household, she can't do that, she can't afford to miss work. Which again could fall within low socio-economic status, and then in turn that was definitely affecting his summer.

This camper had clearly been going through a lot at home and was undoubtedly struggling to fit into the camp environment. Without knowing this specific situation, as a staff member, it would

be easy to get aggravated and angry at this camper for their behaviour, yet there is so much more under the surface.

With these types of situations, knowing what is going on at home can be beneficial for both the child and camp staff. We can find different ways to deal with the child's frustration and help them understand that we are there for them during a tough time. The difficulty is trying to discern what is going on in a child's life when there is little to no communication with the parent, and the child's behaviour is progressively getting worse. As camp staff, situations such as this can be frustrating. I have experienced numerous situations where parents or guardians do not care how their child is acting and the behaviour continues to escalate, leading to termination from camp. These situations are rare, but they leave camp staff questioning what is going on behind the scenes. Overall, to camp staff, knowing about a camper's home life is important in certain situations, but is not everything.

When discussing low-income families with other counsellors, there is a sense that some campers need to be saved from their current situations, and it is our job to provide them with the best possible care when they are at camp. Many participants mentioned that they cannot fathom what some of these campers go through on a daily basis. Not only did counsellors want campers to have a safe, fun camp experience, but they also wanted to make an impact on children's lives. This would often involve conveying to campers the importance of the YMCA values: respect, responsivity, honesty, caring, health and inclusiveness and showing them what a good role model looks like. Counsellors expressed that they wanted to be someone that campers could look up to and learn from. Rose explains how she perceives her role as a camp counsellor,

I would say I perceive my role as a camp counsellor to, I guess be a role model for kids, but also to be that safe person that they can talk about anything. I think that's kind of one of the more important parts of the role.

To Rose, a role model is someone that the children can lean on, someone who provides a safe and healthy space as well as someone who can let the children express themselves freely.

Furthermore, Luke explains how he feels about working with low-income families: "I knew that the Y worked with children who were, who were more likely to be in underprivileged areas and I wanted to help make a difference in their lives". Similarly, Ian has the same mentality, "I want to impact the kids' lives who need it you know". Camp counsellors want to make an impact in all their campers lives but perceive the campers who are from low-income families as in need of the help and guidance of people outside of their communities and social circles.

Challenges Faced by Camp Counsellors

Working with young people has many rewards, but also involves a lot of challenges. Whether this be behavioural problems, dealing with conflicts between young people, low wages, burnout, or becoming too invested in the lives of youth, individuals who work with young people deal with a lot on a daily basis. My research revealed that camp counsellors deal with many situations throughout a day, but the most prominent involves dealing with difficult behaviours. Difficult behaviours can involve, not listening to instructions, not joining in on programs, hitting, kicking, punching other campers, calling campers names, running away, swearing, and the list goes on. Counsellors must devise and lead activities that engage youth while simultaneously dealing with the campers who struggle to follow instructions, refuse to participate, or simply run away from the program area. Staff are given various resources on how to handle difficult behaviours in training, but the creators of these resources cannot possibly anticipate the unique

situations that arise on a day-to-day basis. As Rose explains, where handling challenging situations is concerned, experience is the best teacher:

But unfortunately with camp we can't get really any of the practical, um experience before you do it. So you just kind of have to sit and absorb everything that is being given to you

One participant mentioned another issue that other individuals did not discuss, campers talking about sexuality and race. Rory explains,

You know what, honestly, I would say some of the most difficult moments are when campers say things that are controversial. Because behaviours, I can deal with them, I know how to deal with them, but the thing, what really really challenges me is when campers say things that are racially charged or homophobic, like I struggle to find the wording professionally

Rory conveyed her struggles discussing sexuality and race with campers as she is often unsure how to respond effectively to racially charged comments or discussions about sexuality. She tries to explain to the children that racially charged comments or negative discussions about sexuality (i.e. homophobia) are not tolerated at camp. In the context of providing this explanation, she tries to teach, as opposed to getting angry at campers. She goes onto discuss a situation where a camper looked at another camper and told them that they were going to give them an "Indian rubber burn". Alarmed, the counsellor decided to rectify the situation in a way that might resonate with the child. She explained to him that it is not the words that are used, but the message behind the words. Rory did not go into detail about how the Indian rubber burn was a racist phrase, but she did explain that the phrase has a bad message behind it. Rory reminded the camper that that specific phrase is not appropriate and is disrespectful. "I try to explain things to

kids because I want them to be educated”, she exclaims. One could argue, however, that attributing these types of phrases solely to inappropriateness, or being uneducated, individualizes the problem and deflects from the systemic pervasiveness of racism within the wider society in which kids are socialized.

When discussing with camp counsellors these issues of racism, or homophobia, we often struggled to figure out a plan on how to deal with these situations. It is easy to attribute homophobic slurs or racist phrases to children being young or not being sufficiently educated to understand the true meaning of their words. Furthermore, it is also easy to fault parents or guardians for possibly exposing children to racist or homophobic views. Often, systemic issues are not even remotely considered as counsellors tend to see such transgressions as individual or familial failings (discussed below).

Challenges counsellors face addressing issues of diversity illustrates the complexity of contextualizing the lives of young people and their families in order to put behavioural issues in proper perspective while addressing them accordingly. Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) convey that children who are living in poverty report higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as “a greater incidence of behavioural difficulties, and a lower level of positive engagement at school” in comparison to middle-class children. (Amatea and West-Olatunji, 2007 p. 81). Furthermore, Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) explain that teachers working in schools with high poverty levels felt unprepared when outlining the obstacles and challenges of working with impoverished students, “and by extension their parents/caregivers” (p. 81). Dealing with different groups of children and parents is a large part of a camp counsellor’s job. I recall discussing with co-workers the anxiety we would feel talking to different parents about their child’s behavioural issues at camp. Often there were cases where parents would not care about

how their child behaves, and I remember assuming that the parent was not involved in their child's life. Not knowing if this is true, again, it is easy to assume that the parent or family is to blame for how the child is acting.

In addition, family problems could also be affecting a child's behaviour at camp. There have been instances where parents have disclosed that their child is having difficulties because his or her parents are going through a divorce. In turn, we as camp counsellors, assume that the child is dealing with a lot of stress at home and is then acting out at camp. Participants mentioned that they liked to get to the root of the problem with campers. Counsellors would sit down and ask the child if they can help with anything, or if there was something specifically bothering them. From experience, campers would sometimes disclose what was going on in their lives, and other times they did not want to talk about it. Trying to discern what behaviours are stemming from other issues at home was challenging, and often impossible. Regardless of where behavioural issues are coming from, camp counsellors must support their campers as much as possible, giving them a space to have fun and mingle with their friends. A lot of the time it is difficult to get children to behave or to follow the rules laid out by counsellors. The YMCA has a specific program called the value bead program which is used by counsellors to incentivize children to behave and essentially follow the rules.

The Value Beads Program

Among other responsibilities, camp counsellors are tasked with ensuring that children are exhibiting respectful behaviour towards other campers and staff, which can be tricky when working with youth. Not all young people feel they need to respect camp counsellors, or other children, thus leaving the counsellor with the tough job of moulding these children into respectful and responsible individuals. Each counsellor and individual child has a different

definition of respect, or how respect should be presented in the camp environment. The description given by the YMCA to earn the respect bead is as follows; “recognizing and protecting the inherent worth of every person including oneself”. They then give examples of tasks that can be completed to earn this bead, such as “seeing the good in others” or “taking good care of other’s belongings”. In addition to respect, the YMCA also has a definition for how they would describe responsibility, “being dependable and responsible for one’s choices, actions and commitments”. To earn this bead campers can “stay with their group”, “leave the play area the way they found it” and “keeping their belongings together.” Despite being given a chart with descriptions of how campers can earn their beads, each counsellor has a different idea of what respect, responsibility, and all the other values may look like. Respect could involve listening to your counsellor, participating in group activities, using appropriate language, being kind to other campers, and helping others when needed. Counsellors also felt respectful behaviour entailed campers listening to instructions and participating in all activities when asked.

Many participants explained that they felt it was their job to convey the importance of respectful behaviour. For the YMCA specifically, this is achieved through their value beads program. The YMCA prides itself on its mission, which is to “offer opportunities for personal growth, community involvement and leadership” (YMCAGTA, 2017). Not only does the YMCA have a mission, it has six specific values that influence its actions and decision: caring, health, honesty, inclusiveness, respect, and responsibility. These values transfer over into the camp experience, where each value is attached to a coloured bead. To demonstrate:

Caring	Red bead
Health	Purple bead
Honesty	Blue bead

Inclusiveness	Orange bead
Respect	Yellow bead
Responsibility	Green bead

When a camper displays these types of behaviours, they will receive the bead that corresponds to the specific value they exhibited that day. The program is designed to promote positive behaviour and incentivize personal achievement while also giving the children something they can physically possess in return. Value beads are unique to the YMCA and are used as a marketing tool when advertising for camp. Campers who return to summer camp for consecutive summers are encouraged to bring their beads from the previous year and continue to build on their accomplishments. Often campers are proud of the beads they earn and love showing them off to new campers who have not attended YMCA day camps. Though the program is designed to promote positive behaviour, camp counsellors explained that they used the value beads as a behaviour management tool.

Kelsey: So I find them actually very helpful. Especially when you have those behavioural issues, and you mention, well you know if you continue to be like that, you're not going to get a bead because that's not the way the YMCA works. So, I find them a helpful tool in managing behaviours.

Put differently, Kelsey would use beads to get the campers to listen to instructions or to stop a behaviour that was unwanted at the time. Another participant mentions how the value bead program can be used as a way to reinforce positive behaviours as opposed to always focusing on the negative.

Joy: Um, yeah. I would say that it like, especially for say, when there are more troublesome kids, so when they did something good it was an easy way to reinforce their positive behaviour rather than focus on the negative.

For the kids perceived to be more troublesome, the value beads program can be used to demonstrate that there are rewards for good behaviour. From personal experience, when giving beads to campers who often struggled to follow instructions, the recognition and positive reinforcement of receiving a bead would motivate them to do better in the future. Positive reinforcement can be a useful tool when working with young people.

The Value Beads Program as an Example of Neoliberal Programming

The value beads program can be viewed as a tool of positive reinforcement but can also be examined as a program influenced by neoliberalism. While campers are participating in organized programming, they are expected to act a certain way, listen intently, participate and be respectful towards campers and counsellors. What constitutes respect is defined by the program and does not account for the possibility that students from differing class and ethnoracial backgrounds may exhibit rapport in different ways where signs of respect differ from the middle-class norm. When campers do not follow the prescribed rules, they are often reminded that demonstrating such behaviours will make it unlikely that they will receive a bead that day. When dealing with different behaviours, there is a large focus on how to correct certain actions as opposed to thoroughly understanding where campers' frustrations are coming from. Particularly for marginalized youth, certain behaviours could stem from different situations, whether this be their home life, frustrations regarding oppression or exclusion from peers, community members or authority figures. Bottrell (2007) explains that different experiences can change the ways young people navigate various social systems. Marginalized youth demonstrate different forms

of resistance. Certain behaviours may be stemming from larger systemic issues that children are facing in their daily lives outside of camp. Yosso (2005) furthers the discussion on resistance and explains that resistance is also a source of community cultural wealth. “[T]hose injured by racism and other forms of oppression,” explains Yosso, “discover that they are not alone and moreover are a part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of racialized oppression” (p. 75).

Resistance comes in different forms and can emerge for many reasons that may not be obvious to youth workers. This may especially be the case with those who work seasonal jobs with youth where they do not get a long period of time to individually learn about their campers and what they may be going through. Furthermore, Yosso (2005) explains “resistance may include different forms of oppositional behaviour, such as self-defeating or conformist strategies that feedback into the system of subordination” (pg. 81). Thus, children could be acting in opposition as a form of resistance to the feeling of constantly being targeted and getting in trouble by their counsellor. I have had a personal experience where a camper expressed frustration that they are always getting in trouble. The child explained that they do not try anymore, because no matter what they do, someone is always telling them what they are doing is wrong, leading to further frustration and little change in that child’s behaviour.

The value beads program individualizes children’s behaviours and perpetuates the idea that children who do not display desired behaviours are not worthy of a value bead. Not only does this make campers feel as if they are not worthy of a bead, it reinforces the idea that there is only one acceptable way to act and potentially squashes behaviours that might represent resistant responses to an oppressive or alienating situation or context. This, in turn, places the focus on

individual behaviour and precludes or discourages serious examination of systemic sources of marginalization and alienation.

Participants in my study felt it was their responsibility to instill proper values, help campers reach their goals, all while making a positive impact in their lives. Rory explains the importance of the value beads program, and also highlights how she wants to instill compassion into her campers, as you never know what someone is going through outside of the camp environment. She states,

Definitely the skills, of like the value beads program. I think the biggest one that I focus on is compassion. I think if you have compassion for people a lot of those other skills will come naturally.

Furthermore, Ian also explains how he focuses on the core values with his groups,

We focus so much on our core values, and inclusiveness is one, being respectful is another, we have all these things in place and we talk all the time how we are going to include people and be fair.

Lastly, Kelsey explains how she also uses the YMCA value beads to promote good behaviour,

I would say that it is very easy to instill values, especially working with the Y and the value beads program. So it is very easy to kind of instill those very specifically in campers, but I would say that probably the most important ones for me was respect...I think that respect for people, and the space around you is so incredibly important and it really links back to a lot of different issues that happen in the world when you just don't have respect for either other people, peoples spaces or land.

These participants used the value beads program to emphasize the values that the YMCA strives to instill in their campers. When thinking critically about the YMCA value beads

program, it can be argued that neoliberal values are present within the process of earning beads for good behaviour. Neoliberal values are those that reflect market behaviour, but within the camp context, neoliberal values are conveyed through self-improvement and self-responsibility. When I was a counsellor, I would overhear other camp counsellors telling children that they too can earn a bead if they act like a certain camper who is exhibiting the desired behaviour. Children would often conform to what is asked of them if they are interested in receiving a bead, ultimately reflecting good market behaviour. Campers are taught that earning and accumulating beads is something they should strive for. Often campers would be jealous of others who had earned more beads than them. This would drive campers to try harder to receive more value beads and accumulate as many as they could.

From experience, I know that as a camp counsellor I always strived to help my campers succeed, and we were frequently told in training to highlight the importance of YMCA values, emphasizing to campers the importance of being a leader, cleaning up after themselves, caring for others, and more. If campers display this type of behaviour, the camper group is easier to manage as each child is well-behaved. As a counsellor, I would also convey to my campers the importance of displaying value bead worthy behaviours outside of the camp environment. I would tell my campers how appreciative their guardians would be, and how behaving well would make it easier on them as they would not get in trouble as frequently. Ultimately, neoliberal values are embedded within the value beads program. Children are taught the importance of good values and are rewarded when they demonstrate desirable behaviour. Now that I have conveyed what the value beads program promotes, it is critical to discuss what is considered appropriate behaviour, and who decides what behaviour is acceptable.

What is Appropriate Behaviour?

What is considered to be appropriate behaviour? And who decides what is right or wrong in the camp environment? Children are constantly trying to navigate contexts that are not entirely responsive to their needs and interests and, in doing so, experimenting with ways to represent themselves as individuals. Bottrell (2007) explains that young people navigating different worlds (community, family, school, camp, etc.) often come across contradictory definitions of what is considered appropriate behaviour. In the camp environment, there are often multiple counsellors who have varying ideas of what appropriate behaviour looks like and how to address it. I remember working with counsellors who took disagreeable behaviour very seriously and would discipline children right away if the behaviour continued. On the opposite end, I also worked with counsellors who were more carefree about disagreeable behaviour and would let their campers behave how they wanted with little correction or discipline. This is where the lines get blurred for children. One counsellor is accepting of their behaviour, and then when they are with another counsellor in subsequent weeks, the child is getting in trouble for their behaviour that was deemed okay in another group.

This would be an example of varying perceptions of what is considered appropriate. Furthermore, Bottrell (2007) states “In dealing with marginalization, difficult circumstances and competing demands, young people’s resistances are attempts to counter negative images and to create new ‘centres’ for themselves” (611). As camp counsellors it is easy to deem certain children as the ‘bad kids’ without fully understanding them, or where their behaviour is stemming from. Often, daily struggles in the homes of marginalized youth could include, low-income, struggles to make ends meet, familial conflicts, substance abuse, family violence along with interlocking gendered, racial and class oppression within the broader society (Bottrell,

2007). It is important for camp counsellors to understand the lived experiences of campers, and how they might respond to prevailing factors outside of the camp world.

Camp Counsellors as Neoliberal Role Models

Participants were often sympathetic to what they believe some campers may be going through at home, though they often framed campers' families and communities as deficient by dominant, neoliberal middle-class standards. Camp counsellors often view themselves as saviours of these children, as if it is their job to change campers into someone that they want them to be. The value beads program (discussed above) facilitates this disposition. Hillman (2016) states "the involvement of adult role models who are viewed as successful participants in the employed world can play a critical role in promoting capitalistic values to the youth they mentor" (374). Though camp counsellors are not formally considered mentors, they are still responsible for the wellbeing of their campers when in their care and mentor youth in an informal capacity. Participants mentioned wanting to be a role model and impact the lives of their campers. When discussing how camp counsellors perceive their roles, Rose explained,

I would say that I perceive my role as a camp counsellor to, I guess be a role model for kids but also be that safe person that they can talk to about anything.

Most participants responses were similar, exclaiming that being a role model, or impacting the lives of campers was something important to them. Counsellors wanted to impact children's lives by being an individual that campers can count on and confide in. Not only do counsellors want to impact the lives of children, but they also want to teach them valuable skills, that they can expand upon outside of the camp setting. For example, one counsellor mentioned the importance of social skills. Hannah explains,

I want them to take away more social skills and more respect because its lacking. I feel like the social skills are just lacking, they don't know how to introduce themselves, they don't know how to really interact with people. So having this, and being forced to play around with 10-12 kids every day and interact with all these counsellors, I want them to build these social skills and confidence in themselves to like take that into the real world kinda thing.

Through interacting with children and counsellors on a daily basis, Hannah hopes that children will gain a better understanding of how to act in various social situations. While the role model intentions of camp counsellors are, in virtually all instances, noble, worthwhile and well-intended, it is evident that there is a focus on transforming campers into respectable individuals. Campers are encouraged daily to follow the rules, be responsible, self-regulate and change their behaviour to fit the counsellors' expectations.

Summary

As a camp counsellor myself, I know that there are moments when you are so tired, overwhelmed and stressed that you question whether you can make it through the entire summer. Having plenty of outside conversations with camp counsellors across the GTA at group trainings and meetings, we seem to have one thing in common. Many of us know this job is worth it because we are all there for the kids. As camp staff we want to see them have fun, be happy and ultimately succeed and reach their goals. For those who participated in this study, working as a camp counsellor meant creating safe spaces where youth can forget about anything that they may be dealing with at home or in other realms of their lives. Working as a camp counsellor was also a steppingstone for some of my participants who aspired to have teaching careers. Whether it was making a difference in a young person's life, or just a fun summer job, camp counsellors,

overall, seemed to love what they do. Study participants outlined the various aspects that make their day camp job one of the best summer jobs they have had. Despite many rewarding moments, camp counsellors found that their camp job was exhausting and difficult at times. Camp counsellors shared details as to what makes a good camp counsellor and what challenges they face on a daily basis.

More often than not, counsellors used the YMCA value bead program as a tool to promote good behaviour and motivate their campers to model good values. When critically assessing the value bead program, however, while it is a tool that many campers value, it reinforces the neoliberal assertion that children need to act and behave certain prescribed ways that are reinforced via the availability of rewards. When discussing children's behaviour, camp counsellors would often bring up a camper's home life and how their experiences at home may be negatively affecting their behaviour at camp. Systemic inequalities were often not considered when discussing why children may be acting out at camp, and camp counsellors exhibited a tendency to pathologize the families and communities of youth. This chapter highlighted the importance of understanding what campers may be going through, not just at home, but also the systemic challenges they might be facing in other realms. Moreover, it is crucial for camp counsellors to recognize and engage the strengths and assets that campers may be bringing from home and their communities, especially if these skills are not deemed immediately valuable in the camp context. This theme, and others, will be explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: TO KNOW, OR NOT TO KNOW

The YMCA is known for being an organization that is community-oriented, offering affordable children's programs as well as financial aid and subsidy options. Camp is a YMCA program that is largely subsidized where families and caregivers receive up to a full summer of camp at minimal to no cost. In addition to affordable childcare, camp gives many children the opportunity to mingle with different young people, create bonds with new friends and staff members, and foster different forms of social capital. This chapter will examine camp counsellors' perceptions and pre-conceived notions of the youth with whom they work, their opinions and assumptions regarding what the campers may be going through outside of camp, what counsellors do to help campers reach their goals and, lastly, what forms of social capital, youth and staff can cultivate by way of the camp experience.

Perceptions of Campers' Homelife

A campers homelife is often brought up in conversations between counsellors, or just in general with a camper or group. Children sometimes bring up their home life voluntarily or are asked about it by other campers. The question is, how important is it for counsellors to know about the home life of their campers? Is it better to know? Or not know? There were many instances when I was a camp counsellor, that I would attribute a camper's behaviour to the difficulties that they may be facing at home. Many counsellors discussed campers' home life,

Ian: Really focusing on self-confidence and growth, like positive mindset in kids is so important because they'll, especially with those kids you can tell that they don't have the same situation as other kids, they don't see the positive every day, they just go through the same routine, and see negative after negative.

Rose: Especially working where I worked with that lower socio-economic background, sometimes there were other, you know, social issues that come into those situations where kids don't always have the best home life.

While Rose is describing the socio-economic status of campers, and the 'issues' they face at home and in society, Ian discusses the importance of promoting positivity as some campers may only be experiencing negativity in their lives. Both participants emphasize the struggles that campers may face outside of camp and at home.

From personal experience, it is easy as a camp counsellor to attribute bad behaviour to what campers are going through at home. This is often an assumption and we do not concretely know what the campers are going through when they leave camp, unless a situation is disclosed to us by the campers or parents themselves. Assuming, without evidence, that children are misbehaving due to issues in their home life pathologizes the families of youth and diminishes the influence that systemic inequalities have on the lives of young people. Kainz, Lippold, Sabatine and Datus (2017) explain that "low socio-economic status in a particular urban neighborhood or rural region and is a stronger predictor of children's academic skills and development than individual family markers of economic disadvantage" (p. 71). This could be attributed to characteristics surrounding concentrated disadvantages, such as having less outdoor spaces that are safe for playing, minimal access to food that is healthy and affordable, and overcrowded homes (Kainz, Lippold, Sabatine & Datus, 2017).

In addition, marginalized youth could also be facing different forms of discrimination stemming from intersections of race, class and gender. Young people may be battling disproportionate punishment at school by authority figures who already deem them as deviant (James, 2011; Rankin et al., 2013). Adult figures in their lives could be lowering their

expectations of marginalized youth, giving them the sense that they are unlikely to succeed. The constant punishment and disapproval could easily lead young people to stop trying, as they will always be disproportionately profiled as troubled (Flouri & Midouhas 2016; Hess, 2018; James, 2011; Sriskandarajah, 2019). When dealing with young people, I find this to be a common theme. Children who are constantly getting in trouble for various reasons regularly say that no matter what they do someone is always trying to tell them what they are doing is wrong. “It is difficult for young people to break out of marginalized positioning when it seems to be reinforced at every turn” (Bottrell, 2007, 610). As a camp counsellor, it is easier to attribute misbehaving to a camper’s individual or familial shortcomings as opposed to considering systemic factors that may be affecting their daily lives.

As noted above, young people could be experiencing different forms of discipline from various authority figures at school throughout the year. For example, during the school year, youth could be experiencing disproportionate amounts of discipline for a variety of reasons. Their behaviour could be attributable to discrimination and exclusion that they could experience due to intersections of race, class, and gender. It is possible that teachers are profiling young people based on their race, socio-economic status, gender, familial makeup, which could all result in lower expectations of them. Teachers profiling children could mean that they assume their capabilities based on systemic factors or personal biases. For example, assuming a black child from a low-income home will not succeed academically. I have heard from different campers that they do not like certain teachers at their school because they feel as if they are constantly being singled out for unknown, arbitrary, or ambiguous reasons. I have had campers tell me how much they like me as their counsellor because I treat them the same as other children. Kainz, Lippold, Sabatine and Datus (2017) state, “the schools in high-poverty

neighbourhoods provide fewer or lower quality education resources, and there are fewer examples of education opportunity and success to encourage children as they learn and develop” (p. 71). These are factors that may not be taken into consideration by camp counsellors. Are campers being given quality education and treated fairly during the school year? What kind of relationships do they have with teachers and authority figures? The answers to these questions could explain why campers behave a certain way towards counsellors during their time at summer camp. As one participant from my study who is now a teacher, Ian, explains;

They bring a lot of behaviour that stems from the school year...all of these kids come with different baggage

It is important to note that some counsellors who are hired are still in high school and may not comprehend various systemic issues or what campers may be going through during the school year or at home. Regardless of a counsellors age, we are trained to promote positivity and inclusive relationships among campers and staff.

YMCA's are often built-in low-income communities to promote healthy, active lifestyles, while also providing subsidized programs for children. Summer camp programs are subsidized by the government and the YMCA for children and families who need more financial support. Hannah explains,

I feel like a lot of these kids, especially if they're subsidized through the program kind of come from, I don't want to stereotype it, but they do come from rougher backgrounds where maybe their parents aren't giving them as much attention, like this is their time for them to get the attention, the affection, any sort of need they want. So, I feel it's instilled in us, we have to do our best to get the best out of them.

Here, Hannah is insinuating that children who are subsidized may come from “rougher backgrounds,” where they may not be given a lot of attention. She believes that it is her responsibility to fill this perceived void when campers are in her care. Youth workers feeling as if it is their job to change children’s lives diminishes the possibility that these children are succeeding and doing well outside of camp. Rose also explains how children from low-income families may not have the best life at home;

Especially working where I worked, with that lower socio-economic background, sometimes there were other you know social issues that come up into those situations where kids don’t always have the best home life.

Rose is also suggesting that children who come from impoverished homes may come from homes that are somehow deficient, which is not the case for every child experiencing poverty. Pathologizing communities leaves little room for acknowledgment of the positive attributes and community cultural wealth that campers may bring to the camp setting.

Hillman (2016) expands on this idea, “normative youth development is frequently contrasted with a narrative of troubled, delinquent and criminalized youth as a phenomenon stemming from the absence of caring and responsible role models” (p. 369). Phelan et al. (1991) present the multiple worlds model, where youth learn how to navigate different social contexts such as home, peer groups and school. Youth are often able to construct their own social realities based on their social context. Thus, an individual may act a specific way at home, and then act significantly different in a school setting, or with their peers. Phelan et al. multiple worlds perspective can be applied to the camp experience, as camp is another social context youth must navigate. Therefore, the world of camp may be incongruent with that child’s ‘worlds’ of community and family.

In Phelan et al. (1991) the multiple world model is applied the school setting. Since camp is comparable to the school experience, having a planned day, listening to authority figures, learning new skills; Phelan et al. (1991) findings could be useful when working in a camp setting. “The multiple worlds model has important implications for schools and learning,” suggest Phelan et al. (1991). “Perhaps most significant it provides teachers and others with a way of thinking about their students in a more holistic way” (p. 246). Furthermore, Phelan et al. explain that teachers specifically should “identify institutional structures that operate to facilitate boundary crossing strategies that do not require students to give up or hide important features of their lives” (p. 246). These findings could be applied to other professions involving youth work. Life at home may be different for all children, and camp counsellors should recognize that various inequalities may not be congruent with the way a child is behaving or the way they are perceived in the camp environment. Camp counsellors do not intend to pathologize children and their communities, but it is critical to recognize why certain children are being treated differently from their peers and how this may be affecting them and their camp experience.

While it is fair to consider that kids growing up in lower socioeconomic contexts might have unique challenges, counsellors articulated little recognition of the community cultural wealth that young people bring to camp and how they might build on this. My research revealed that it was rare for camp counsellors to mention campers who, to them, had good experiences at home. Often discussions were surrounding the negative attributes associated with home life, such as poverty, single-parent households, drugs/alcohol abuse. Focusing on the negative diminishes the fact that children from marginalized communities come to camp with various skills and community cultural wealth that may not be discussed. Yosso (2005) uses the example of a white middle-class family who has access to a computer. The child from this family may have

knowledge about computer lingo and electronics while a child from a low-income household may not. As opposed to focusing on the child being impoverished and not being able to access a computer, it is important acknowledge the skills and unique qualities they possess. Yosso (2005) explains that children from marginalized communities may acquire cultural capital by way of different experiences, for example, “techniques of conducting errands on the city bus and translating mail, phone calls and coupons for her/his mother” (Yosso, 2005 p. 76). This is an example of a skill that children from various marginalized communities may possess, in comparison to the white middle-class child understanding different computer lingo.

From a personal experience, I was involved in a situation where I was able to see an example of the cultural wealth that a young person from a marginalized community possesses. Almost every other day I would be dealing with an incident where this child was running away from the group. This camper would still be in sight but was too far away for the counsellor to run a game with other campers, while simultaneously keeping an eye on the child. On one occasion, the child’s counsellor could not find the camper, thereby leading us to conduct a missing child search. It was short as we found the camper almost instantly. But this situation warranted a phone call home and required the child to be picked up. The mother explained that she does not have a car and that she cannot afford to take a taxi to the camp to pick him up. For this reason, she allowed him to use the city bus. Not thinking, I was appalled by her response, thinking, how could she let her child take the city bus alone? Now it is easy to understand that taking the city bus could be a regular occurrence for the camper and is a unique skill that he could possess owing to his class background.

Research shows that middle-class generation X parents are more prone to overprotective ‘helicopter’ parenting than child guardians from poor or working-class backgrounds (Lukianoff

& Haidt, 2018). Middle-class parents are less likely to allow their kids to engage in unsupervised activities or take risks. While this might seem like wise parenting, experts argue that it impedes the social and emotional development of young people (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). By contrast, poor and working-class parents, because of differing parenting philosophies grounded in practical factors such as those faced by the parent of this particular child, tend to assign kids mature tasks, and allow them greater freedom at an earlier age (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018).

Hence, my initial reaction to the mother's explanation is one illustration of the cultural mismatch between camp (marked by neoliberal, middle-class values) and the communities of marginalized youth. Yosso (2005) explains that the "cultural knowledge [of a given marginalized community] is valuable to the student and her/his family but is not necessarily considered to carry any capital in the school context" (76). Regarding my particular scenario, clearly, I did not see the ability to take the city bus as exemplifying maturity and self-sufficiency on the part of this camper. In hindsight a clear illustration of community cultural wealth as taking the bus is a skill he may possess. At that moment, it was easy to assume that the parent did not care about their child and was neglecting his safety by letting him take the city bus, which may have not been the case at all. It is important for camp counsellors to recognize the different skills and aptitudes that campers can bring from their own communities, even if these skills are not considered 'normal' to them given that most counsellors view the world through a middle-class lens. Understanding campers' various strengths may mitigate the tendency to pathologize the homes and communities of marginalized youth.

Pathologizing Campers and their Communities

Often the presumptions of low-income families are deficit driven, meaning that these families are assumed to have less, possess less, or are in greater need of support. A deficit way of

thinking about low-income families and their communities obfuscates structural causes of inequality such as racism. Evidentially, camp counsellors seem to subscribe to the notion that children's communities are inherently pathological, and it is up to the YMCA, as well as other dominant institutions, to instill proper values and link them to the 'right' social capital. These values often include individual resilience, initiative, hard work, inclusiveness, and responsibility.

Hess (2019) states, "educators might encourage a pedagogy of oppression, through which educators facilitate youth to explicitly challenge forces that impact their lives over a pedagogy of vulnerability, through which educators encourage youth to bare their vulnerabilities and 'bounce back' from trauma without addressing larger systemic issues" (p, 488-489). The idea that children should 'bounce back' is prominent within the camp setting. Counsellors often expect campers to be ready for the day, have a positive attitude, and essentially make camp a place where they can forget about what they are dealing with on the outside. Hess (2019) also outlines different definitions of resilience, explaining that resilience often means overcoming obstacles despite adversity. "Defining resilience in this way," she explains, "individualizes social problems and locates them in the child, rather than targeting oppressive structures" (Hess, 2019). Placing the blame on the child or family specifically diminishes the role that structural inequalities play in forming various disadvantages. A risk factor discourse, therefore "displaces risks on the individual" (Hess, 2019, p 490). For an example of risk factor discourse, Hess describes drug use. The use of drugs is usually equated to the individual being at risk, as opposed to the systemic oppression that could be leading to drug use. Individualizing risks often involves recognizing the "symptoms of a system" for example, "hopelessness, low self-esteem and low academic expectations", as opposed to exploring and understanding the root causes (Hess, 2019 p. 490). Youth from low-income communities often have few expectations placed upon them,

especially within the academic sector. It is assumed that children from low-income communities will not be able to make it out and become successful adults. This could be attributed to, as Hess explains, the individualization of risk, assuming that young people will not be successful academically, or that they are vulnerable and need help because of their community and financial situation. Simply emphasizing vulnerability, “locates the responsibility for recovering from systemic oppression in the child” (Hess, 2019 p. 490). Hess details the difference between vulnerability and oppression which will be discussed further.

Hess (2019) explains the importance of differentiating between the pedagogy of vulnerability and pedagogy of oppression. A pedagogy of oppression recognizes that vulnerabilities are produced by oppression. Placing blame on the child minimizes the impact that various forms of systemic oppression have on the lives of youth and their communities. In addition, young people are often taught through resilience education that they should “accept oppression and be able to succeed despite it” (Hess, 2019, p. 491). Hess also discusses how racism plays a large role in the systemic oppression of low-income communities. Furthermore, critical race theory is employed as a framework that pinpoints race and racism as a structure that enables oppression (Hess, 2019). It is important to note that individuals who are labeled as vulnerable or ‘at-risk’ are often youth of colour who have great socioeconomic challenges (Hess, 2019). Not only is it important to teach young people the coded language surrounding phrases such as ‘at risk’, but it is important for them to understand various systemic oppressions that are behind the everyday challenges they face. Hess (2019) calls for a shift in resilience education, which aligns itself with neoliberal values, and move to teachings surrounding the pedagogy of oppression.

When it comes to the camp environment, we see many children facing various struggles, and we want to push them to succeed despite what they are going through. It would be interesting to involve a training session, discussing the pedagogy of oppression and what we can do to support, but not further marginalized youth from low-income communities. The YMCA and other charitable organizations often emphasize on their websites that they serve low-income families and offer various subsidy options so all members of the community can enjoy their services.

The YMCA also prides themselves on their values and their goals. Especially for their summer camp programs. Furthermore, the YMCA markets their value bead program as a unique program to the YMCA, where children receive beads for positive behaviour. The YMCA emphasizes on its website that children should choose the YMCA as its values are special, and children will also leave camp receiving something to show for their success. Similar institutions market themselves in comparable ways. For example, youth mentorship programs discussed by Hillman (2016) often highlight the importance of hegemonic normative values. These values are then pushed upon impressionable youth, demonstrating to them the correct way to behave in society. It is essentially up to programs like the YMCA, and other dominant institutions to convey proper goals and values. Thus, getting young people in the community to grow up, find a job, and fit into contemporary society.

Furthermore, camp counsellors seemed to align themselves with the idea that the YMCA is there to better all children, and especially those who come from low-income and 'at-risk' communities. Emphasis often revolved around the YMCA being a safe space, and counsellors were essentially individuals that campers could count on regardless of their situation. In addition, importance was frequently placed on helping these kids, working towards bettering their day so

they did not need to focus on what they may be going through on the outside. Focusing on bettering camper lives often meant that little attention is paid to the camper's strengths and assets that they may bring to camp from their communities. Hess (2019) explains that we should see the strengths, assets, and capabilities of young people as opposed to their vulnerabilities and traumas. I believe that it is important for camp counsellors to also focus and build on campers' strengths and assets as opposed to focusing on what they are going through at home. Wanting to make a difference in a child's life is important to counsellors and this can be done through supporting young people in how they express and convey their strengths.

The Strengths and Assets of Youth

When asked about what campers bring to camp in terms of strengths and assets, counsellors often explained that children were resilient, as previously discussed. Resiliency for campers may mean that they are going through struggles at home and still come to camp with enthusiasm and an open mind. Camp counsellors would focus on campers' resiliency as opposed to their strengths and assets and what they have to offer to the camp environment. Rose explained how she would enjoy the carefree, excitement that children would bring to camp. "I think that's kind of fun, that they have this carefree way of experiencing life and allowing everything to be exciting". Ian also explains that excitement is something that campers bring to camp despite their circumstances, "all of these kids come with different baggage, but the excitement aspect doesn't really change for any of them". In addition, participants were also asked how children's unique strengths and abilities were integrated into programming. One of the main responses involved getting the children's input. Camp counsellors explained that they would ask children about their interests and how they could incorporate them into programming. "I think counsellors work really hard to do what their campers like because it makes everyone

happier” Rory conveys. This can sometimes be a challenge as different campers have different interests. It is interesting to note that when asked about the strengths and assets that campers brought to camp, counsellors frequently responded with their energy, resilience, and attitude. These strengths do not necessarily allude to what youth are bridging from their communities, such as a critical resistance consciousness, or a greater sense of independence and self-sufficiency as illustrated by the young boy described above who took the bus home by himself. Maybe it is possible that camp counsellors do not necessarily know the strengths that young people bring from their communities, or how to incorporate these strengths into day-to-day programming.

Camp as a Site for the Cultivation of Social Capital

It is evident through my research that camp counsellors truly care about the children they work with and ultimately want the best for campers and their families. Not only do camp counsellors explain the impact they have had on campers’ lives, but they also highlight the impact that campers have on them as staff. Making strong bonds with campers was mentioned frequently when asked what camp counsellors enjoyed about working in the camp setting. In addition, camp staff mentioned the worthwhile relationships they made with other staff. From personal experience, we go through a lot together during the summer. From dealing with difficult behaviours, burn out, too difficult situations with parents, we are there for each other through it all. It is comforting to confide in other counsellors when you are having a rough time. Counsellors mention throughout the summer that it is normal to have bad days and help new counsellors or experienced ones with different ways to handle difficult scenarios. Study participants mentioned how grateful they were for camp because it connected them with amazing

people that they remain friends with, even after summer camp had ended. Ian explains his experience working at camp and the impact that other staff and managers had on him.

I think back to the people who impacted my life and made me a better educator or a better counsellor, like my old camp boss, unbelievable leader. My co-workers, like the things I've learned from them are unbelievable... I learned so many new things in the way that I talked to kids, in comparison to how you talked to kids. It was just all these people put together, it's like you pull things from everybody and it comes into who you are.

Ian is highlighting how he learned from other counsellors in regards to how they handle various situations, and how these lessons bettered him as an educator. Rose also had a positive experience at camp when it came to staff relationships, "The staff also obviously had a huge impact on me and it was just the best group of people to work with and I wouldn't have imagined working anywhere else".

Learning from others is a large part of a camp counsellors' job. What works for one counsellor and their campers, may not work for another. During this process, camp counsellors are also building social capital. Acquiring new skills and techniques from other experienced youth workers can help individuals become better staff members. As camp counsellors, we have to deal with many different situations that we may not be prepared for. These situations expand our experiences and give us the opportunity to learn from others and understand what works and what does not. Camp gives staff the opportunity to work with various groups of young people, which could help them in their future careers as educators.

Camps also frequently hire young people who may have not worked with youth before. These counsellors often look up to those with experience to guide them and assist them in

planning and running activities. Experienced counsellors are also able to give advice to new counsellors on how to handle challenging behaviours. These situations expand camp counsellor's social capital, learning new strategies, making connections with different children and staff and gaining plenty of experience. Not only do camp staff gain social capital through the camp experience, campers can also acquire social capital. Campers can make new friends with other children who they may not have met outside of the camp environment functioning as a source of social capital. At camp, youth also learn various skills that highlight the importance of working together and creating inclusive spaces.

The YMCA emphasizes the importance of including all individuals in their programs, which also transfers over into the camp setting. For example, YMCA day camps offer an Integration Program which focuses on working one on one with campers who have differing abilities. For example autistic campers, campers who have cerebral palsy, oppositional defiant disorder, attention deficit disorder, among others. Camper groups are encouraged to ask about Integration campers and involve them in all activities. Some children may have not had the opportunity to experience playing games with an individual who has autism, or cerebral palsy for example. Campers who attend YMCA day camps can take the skills they learned from camp and apply them to their school experiences. This is something they may not have acquired without attending day camp programs.

Furthermore, camp also gives young people the opportunity to bond and create relationships with their counsellors. Participants mentioned how positive it felt when campers would say that they looked up to them, or that they were the camper's favorite counsellor. Hannah states, "I had one kid at the end of the summer who said, "I want to be just like you when I grow up" and I was like wow, oh my god like, that's crazy... I like cried". Similarly,

Rebecca explains, “Hopefully a child is able to connect with a counsellor throughout the summer. Especially when they are there the whole summer, so they have that role model that they look up to and can’t wait to see next summer, which is also exciting for them”. These types of camper to staff relationships impact both individuals which is exemplified through Hannah and Rebecca’s experiences.

Social Capital from Different Worlds

Even though camp may be a vessel through which young people gain different forms of social capital, little recognition is brought to the fact that many young people gain important and worthwhile social capital by way of their lived experiences within their communities (Yosso, 2005). It is easy to assume that the social capital obtained at camp is superior to that accumulated within one’s community. Seemingly, camp counsellors wanted camp to be a safe space where young people can learn proper values and learn to work together. Providing a safe space for campers to learn about proper values is a juxtaposition against kids from marginalized communities. Kids from all communities have the ability to cultivate different forms of social capital; it is not just kids from low-income communities who need to be guided and taught the importance of good values. Marshall, Astone, Blum, Jejeebhoy, Delany-Moretlwe, Brahmhatt, Olumide and Wang (2014) state, “a growing body of evidence suggests that the presence and amount of social capital is essential for the health and successful development of young people” (p. 22). Young people can gain social capital through who they people know, their parents, peers, friends, community members, mentors, and more. Marshall et al. (2014) explain that relationships between people can be a source of social capital, whether this occurs within an institutional setting (family), or organization (school). Marshall et al. (2014) use the example of social network ties, which are often strong between counsellors and campers if the counsellor is

trusted by the campers in their group. Social network ties can be strong in school settings for example, but can also be lacking (Marshall et al, 2014). Marshall et al, (2014) explain that “when student network ties are equitably distributed, students with behaviour problems are less likely to become disengaged compared to classrooms with more inequitable social ties, suggesting that students can draw on social capital from peers to mitigate academic disengagement” (p. 22). Thus, having strong relationships and network ties in a classroom setting can yield positive results for student engagement.

As camp counsellors, sometimes you are given challenging groups. From personal experience, when I had a group of children who were great listeners, it was often the case that the camper who misbehaved in other groups would start behaving when paired with campers who listened to their counsellors and participated in activities. When a child would misbehave the rest of the campers would encourage the individual to join the group and participate in the activity that we were doing. More often than not, the camper would listen to their peers, join in on the activity and have a great time. Sometimes the opposite situation exists when a camper group is listening, but they get angry and upset at the one individual that is not. In this situation, the camper who is not listening becomes more frustrated with the group and does not want to participate at all. In this type of situation, it is the counsellor’s job to talk to their group about inclusivity and creating bonds with others. Creating strong relationships between campers, and campers and counsellors often makes for an easier day of happier camper groups and children who want to participate. These situations highlight the importance of social capital and strong network ties between peers and friends.

In addition, camp can also serve as a site for bridging social capital. Although marginalized youth cultivate various forms of social capital within their communities, camp

gives them the opportunity to build valuable social capital beyond their communities and immediate social circles. Camp is filled with many different children from all types of communities and backgrounds, giving youth the opportunity to mingle and converse with those from different social locations. Children already actively foster bonding social capital within their communities (Gosine, 2021). If camp counsellors are willing to engage with the strengths, assets and experiences that campers bring from their communities, the bridging social capital that they cultivate at camp can complement the bonding social capital from their communities. The bridging social capital fostered at camp can thereby enlarge the opportunities, social networks and outlooks of marginalized youth. In addition, marginalized youth often come from communities with strong social ties, but these are ties that tend to be inward-looking (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gosine, 2021; Gosine & Islam, 2014). Hence the bridging social capital they can cultivate at camp can broaden the horizons of such youth and allow them to envision a greater range of possibilities. Campers being able to interact with over a hundred different people throughout their day, both children and adults, gives them the opportunity to learn new social skills, listen to other people's stories, learn how to deal with different sorts of behaviours and issues within their groups, build upon their strengths and assets in the camp environment, and become privy to new opportunities.

Summary

It is evident that camp is a place where young people go to have fun, play games, and meet new friends. But campers have the opportunity to leave with so much more than that. Participants in my study strived to create strong bonds with both campers and colleagues as they wanted to make lasting impacts on the lives of the children with whom they worked. Counsellors often described a sense of fulfilment when a camper would say that they are the best counsellor

they had ever had, or that they loved coming to camp every day. These were the reasons why camp counsellors loved their jobs and continued to come back for multiple summers. Not only were counsellors and campers having fun at camp every day, they were also generating different forms of social capital. Counsellors can make connections with other staff members, gain valuable experience working with youth, and learn new problem-solving skills. Campers are able to meet new people whom they may not have met outside of camp, connect with staff who can provide guidance, and leave camp knowing and possibly implementing the value beads program into their daily lives. Every camp experience is different for both campers and staff, but what they take away from this experience can be rewarding and possibly life-changing. As study participant Luke noted, he would have chosen a career working with adults if he had not worked at camp. The excitement, unpredictability of working with youth, and the impact that participants could conceivably have on the life of a child, made the downfalls of working at camp truly worth it.

Chapter five examined how camp counsellors perceive the home lives of their campers. Despite noble intent on the part of counsellors, conversations revealed a tendency to pathologize the families and communities of campers from marginalized backgrounds. It was common for camp counsellors to assume that marginalized youth did not have the best home life, and it was their job to make camp fun and carefree so children could forget about their troubles at home. This chapter also examined the importance of recognizing campers' strengths and assets that they bring to camp from their communities, and how these strengths and assets need to be recognized as valuable and worthy in the camp context. Lastly, in this chapter, I discussed two different forms of social capital, bonding, and bridging, and how the camp experience can benefit all children when it comes to making connections and valuable friendships outside of

one's everyday community. In all, summer camp has a great deal to offer young people of all backgrounds in terms of positively impacting their psychosocial development and enhancing their opportunities. At the same time, neoliberal influences on youth programming results in camps imposing dominant values on marginalized youth whose lived experience is often understood in somewhat pathological terms.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore multiple aspects of youth work, with a focus on the unique abilities, resources, and assets that young people bring to camp, in order to understand the extent to which strengths, resources and assets are recognized and engaged in by counsellors. My goal in writing this thesis was threefold. First, I wanted to highlight the ways in which the summer camp experience enriches the lives of young campers and youth workers. Second, I aimed to provide insight into the workplace experiences and perceptions of camp counsellors, with a particular interest in their approach to youth work and how they conceptualize the lives and communities of the diverse young people with whom they work. Finally, amid the backdrop of an increasingly diverse society, I set out to understand the ideological forces that inform the YMCA's youth programs and the initiatives taken to accommodate diversity and promote inclusivity.

The thesis was informed by personal experience, the in-depth interview narratives of eight YMCA day camp counsellors, academic literature and various sociological perspectives that help spotlight the importance of camps for youth along with the challenges of youth programming in a diverse society. This final chapter will outline what I have learned from my MA research by elucidating and making sense of my core findings. In addition, I will discuss the importance of summer camps, and how youth workers have a significant job that is generally undervalued. I will then elucidate how the camp experience can compensate for the perils of kids spending more time online, as well as 'helicopter parenting' in our current society. This concluding chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the benefits of the camping experience for both campers and youth workers. The second broad theme discussed pertains to the rewards and challenges of youth work as articulated by study participants. I conclude with a

discussion regarding the neoliberal influence on YMCA programming and the implications for accommodating diversity and fostering an inclusive camping environment.

Overall Benefits of Summer Camp for Campers and Staff

This thesis has highlighted many beneficial aspects of the camping experience for both campers and staff. Over my years of being a camp counsellor I have seen many children grow and mature over multiple summers attending YMCA day camps. I had the privilege of watching some campers grow immensely over the years, learning new skills, reaching their goals, and creating new ones. During our camp training, we discuss how we can make the camp experience memorable for our campers. Our superiors emphasize the importance of creating positive relationships with young people given the potentially profound impact we can have on their lives. I have had campers who started attending YMCA day camps when they were 5 years old, returning each year, giving me the opportunity to witness them grow over 5 years. Some campers would end up growing too old (over the age of 12) for camp and become volunteer counsellors, helping me and others with getting supplies, running games and songs. Many campers would say that they wanted to become camp counsellors when they were old enough, which was rewarding to hear.

As mentioned previously, camp gives children the opportunity to create bonds with both campers and staff. Some camper/staff relationships are strong, where campers leave a lasting impact on camp counsellors and vice versa. Creating lasting impacts is often our goal as camp counsellors, but there are also many other benefits for children attending day camps. Research shows that attending camps and youth programs can be associated with positive childhood development (Allen, Cox & Cooper, 2006; Henderson et al., 2006; Schelbe et al, 2018; Whitley, Forneris & Barker, 2015). Children are gaining valuable experiences by working with others in a

fun, indoor/outdoor setting, making lasting relationships and learning new skills (Henderson et al., 2006). Camp can be used as childcare for parents who are working over the summer, but camp also plays an important role in getting children outside, involved in physical play in a communal setting, instead of viewing screens indoors.

The testimonies of my study participants echoed prevailing research as well as my own youth work experiences by inviting attention to the many benefits of the camping experience for all involved. Counsellors mentioned how rewarding their time at camp was, they were able to see children reach their goals, come out of their shells, make long-lasting bonds with campers and other staff members, gain experience working with youth for future job opportunities and ultimately work a summer job that they looked forward to going to each day. From the perspective of the camper, I have heard many children say how much they love camp, how much they love their counsellor, the crafts they make, the games they play, and how they cannot wait to come back next summer.

The Importance of Camp to Children in the Smartphone Age

The argument can be made that the value of camp for kids is more urgent and pronounced today given modern trends in youth development and parenting. With growing advances in technology, children are wanting to play outside less and are more immersed than ever in the digital world resulting in a decline in face-to-face interactions with people beyond siblings and parents. (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). There are countless moments throughout my day when working as a camp counsellor that I would hear campers say, “why aren’t I allowed to use my phone”, “can I take out my iPad”, “I would rather be at home playing video games”. As the years went on working at a day camp, I found that these statements became more prominent throughout the day. Campers would tell me that they did not want to play the game that we were

playing because it is boring. One of the most common complaints I would get throughout the day is, “I don’t want to go outside”. This was always surprising to hear, as I associate children with playing outside, not sitting inside viewing a tablet. Children today are spending more time alone interacting by way of the internet (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019).

The internet is a great resource that serves many purposes and offers a multiplicity of possibilities. At the same time, socializing primarily by way of computers and smartphones can create several long-term consequences for youth. One drawback of excessive time spent in front of screens is that youth have less opportunity to accumulate real-world lived experience and can take longer to achieve life milestones (e.g. taking on employment, dating, obtaining a driver’s license etc.) and thus can mature and develop at a slower rate than the youth of previous generations (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). In addition, less face-to-face interaction and more time spent online can hamper their ability to develop social and interpersonal skills. When living a life largely devoid of real-life interactions with peers that they get at camp, young people are deprived of the opportunity to experience the real-world joy of shared collective experiences and successes. They are also denied the opportunity to make mistakes and experience conflict and awkward moments from which they can learn and grow. As Lukianoff and Haidt (2019) explain, “[V]irtual groups are not the same as in-person connections; they do not satisfy the need for belonging in the same way” (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019, p. 153).

In addition, the online world can exacerbate youth mental health issues, specifically because of online harassment, bullying, social comparisons, where girls are most profoundly affected (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). As a camp counsellor who primarily worked with young girls, I would constantly hear conversations about Instagram and girls talking to each other about how many followers they had. My campers were between the ages of 8 and 12 and were very

invested in how they appeared online. Campers who did not have Instagram would tell me how they feel left out and how they wish their parents would let them have access to social media. Thus, places such as camp and children's programs are important as they pull children away from mobile devices and back to traditional outdoor/indoor play. Campers are able to create these relationships in person rather than virtually.

Importantly, Lukianoff and Haidt (2019) state, "kids who spend more time off screens, especially if they are engaged in non-screen social activities, are at a lower risk for depression and suicidal thinking" (p. 156). This indicates how attending day camps or activities not involving technology can be important for young people and their psychological well-being. Getting fresh air, interacting with different sorts of adults and children, making new friends, running, playing games, all of these activities are what children can expect when they come to camp. Technology is only permitted under certain circumstances, meaning youth need to interact with each other for eight hours a day, face-to-face, without smartphones, tablets, and social media. For many children the main desire for mobile internet access is social media, playing games, and so on, but some children are also sent with phones by their parents and are asked to keep in contact all throughout the day, so parents know that their child is doing okay. This is discussed below in the context of helicopter parenting.

Helicopter Parenting

Another interesting phenomenon as technology advances and times change is the proliferation of helicopter parenting. Helicopter parenting is something that I have experienced many times working with the YMCA. My co-workers have also shared with me their experiences with helicopter parents, and how prevalent helicopter parenting is. 'Helicopter parenting' refers to parents, particularly middle-class parents, being more overprotective of their

kids than ever before (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). Over-protective parenting has some serious implications. Firstly, children are granted less unsupervised playtime, giving them less opportunity to develop social and interpersonal skills while also deprived of opportunities to make mistakes from which they can learn. Helicopter parenting also minimizes a child's chance to cultivate a sense of independence and self-confidence (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). Raising children in a way that teaches them that danger lurks everywhere can reduce the inclination to explore new experiences in the real world, hinders their ability to learn skills, and promotes hyperbolic assessments of risk. Lukianoff and Haidt (2019) explain that it is unlikely for a stranger to kidnap a child on the street, and more kidnappings exist within the family, yet parents are constantly worried about teaching children to fear strangers. In addition, children who are brought up this way “may be more likely than kids in previous generations to believe that they should flee or avoid anything that could be constructed as even a minor threat” (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019 p. 180). Overly protective parenting can result in paranoid kids socialized to believe that danger is everywhere, subsequently leading to more psychologically ‘fragile’ children.

While working-class parents tend to be less protective of their kids in that they generally grant them more free rein, working-class kids tend not to be as adept as middle-class youth at navigating structure and institutional expectations (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). This is where camp can help. Camp gives all children the opportunity to engage in structured programming, interact with peers and build social capital while also being taught worthwhile values. Working-class children and those of more privileged backgrounds alike are therefore able to gain experience with structure, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and working as a team. Being in a setting where they can meet and collaborate with new adults as well as kids of differing backgrounds provides the opportunity to foster valuable bridging social capital that can enable

them to diversify and enrich their outlooks and identities and expand their opportunities. Furthermore, free, unsupervised play can help “children develop the skills of cooperation and dispute resolution that are closely related to the ‘art of association’ upon which democracies depend” (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019, p. 194). As camp counsellors, we interact with a lot of parents who are overprotective, proverbial helicopter parents, who often want full descriptions detailing how their child’s day went, and from personal experience, these children are often more emotional and nervous than other campers. One of the more extreme parents called the camp phone every hour to check in on her child. The child was eventually withdrawn from camp and we never saw him again.

These social trends make camp more important for youth than at any point in history. With the rise of technology, and the fear parents have surrounding their children’s wellbeing, young people are playing outside less and are increasingly spending time inside with technology (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). Camp gives youth the opportunity to interact face-to-face with peers and young adults in a semi-structured setting away from parents and takes them away from the internet and smartphones. The camp experience gives children the ability to cultivate social and interpersonal skills along with a sense of independence. It is a setting where they can make mistakes, experience awkward moments and interactions, and learn from these experiences. Furthermore, free play is exceedingly important for children. Burdette and Whitaker (2005) explain the importance of free play, specifically outdoor play, “for children the outdoors seems to provide such an enriched environment...outdoors is where free play and gross motor activity in young children are most likely to occur” (p. 47-48).

For specific camper groups, such as multi-sport, or variety, time outside is a significant part of a camper’s day. Campers spend the majority of the afternoon engaging in loosely

structured activities and sometimes participate in free play. Playing outdoors, Burdette and Whitaker (2005) explain, leaves plenty of room for children to engage in decision-making opportunities “that stimulate problem solving and creative thinking because outdoor spaces are often more varied and less structured than indoor spaces” (p. 48). Outdoor games and activities are often less structured at camp. Counsellors would frequently let their campers blow off steam by letting them run around and play with one another. Campers can also enhance their gross motor skills through continuous movement as they are not as constrained as they would be playing indoors (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). Problem-solving and decision making also occur when children engage in free play (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). Ultimately, play initiates social interaction, which is prominent in the camp setting.

One of the main skills that children learn at camp is teamwork. Teamwork can involve working with their groups, learning how to compromise and cooperate with each other, learning to deal with issues that may arise among their peers, and more. These are all daily experiences from which campers can grow and mature. These are skills that campers cannot learn in the same way when interacting with each other online or via smartphones. It is evident with the rise in technology and time spent online that the camp experience is something from which children stand to benefit immensely. Children gain valuable experiences, relationships, social capital, and lessons from a summer at camp.

The Rewards and Challenges of Youth Work

One of the goals of my thesis was to understand the motivations and practice philosophies of camp counsellors and how they view and conduct themselves around the young people with whom they work. To understand what it means to be a camp counsellor and what the job entails, my exploration of this theme was guided by several sub-questions: How do YMCA

day camp counsellors perceive their roles and the children with whom they work with? What sorts of challenges do camp counsellors face on a daily basis? Where do these challenges stem from and how do counsellors overcome them? How do camp counsellors work to build upon campers' strengths and assets that they bring from their communities and families? And how do camp counsellors go about engaging and creating an inclusive environment for all?

A significant finding of this study is that, despite generally enjoying youth work, camp counsellors go through a lot of experiences and challenges throughout a summer that frequently go unnoticed. Youth work, and more specifically the job of a camp counsellor, can be viewed as an easy summer job where you get paid to play with children all day. My study has highlighted that the job of a camp counsellor is not simply playing with children all day but entails hard work and obstacles to overcome. A participant in my study had specifically mentioned a story where a parent came in asking where a staff had gone that was working last summer, and why they did not return to camp this summer. Luke, my study participant responded and said that the staff had found a job elsewhere in the construction field to which the parent responded, "oh, they finally found a real job". This was both shocking and insulting as a day camp staff member, as this job is very real to many of us and can be exhausting. Not only is this type of mindset from the public demeaning, but it makes youth workers feel as if we are not valued.

In addition, there was a lack of literature discussing the day camp counsellor role from the perspective of counsellors, and more specifically how they perceive the youth under their supervision. Many articles focus on camper satisfaction as well as how day camps are great for socialization and positive and healthy development in young people (Wahl-Alexander, Richards, Washburn, 2017; Henderson, Bialeschki, James, 2007; Allen, Cox, Cooper, 2006). As a researcher, I wanted to convey the feelings of camp counsellors, particularly how they perceived

children, and how they work to understand different children's needs. Furthermore, it was important to highlight the YMCA, the communities they are typically serving and the values they promote. As previously mentioned, YMCAs are often placed in lower-income communities and promote togetherness, healthy lifestyles and admirable goals and values. I strived to understand why camp counsellors chose to work at the YMCA specifically and how counsellors viewed campers from lower-income communities.

How do YMCA Day Camp Counsellors Perceive their Roles?

It was evident through my research that all my participants loved their jobs as YMCA summer day camp counsellors. Many of the participants came back to camp for subsequent years and even moved up from the counsellor role to more senior positions. Counsellors loved working with different groups of children and frequently brought up YMCA values of respect, responsibility, inclusiveness, health, caring, and honesty. Participants also mentioned the importance of staff culture and how much they enjoyed the people they worked with and the bonds they made with their co-workers. Even for myself, there are counsellors from my first year of working at the YMCA that I consider my close friends, simply because we got along so well after meeting at the Y. The staff culture at the YMCA was unlike any other jobs that I had. Many staff members had similar interests, with one of the biggest being a love for children and career aspirations pertaining to children and youth. We all wanted to see our campers reach their goals and enjoy themselves while in our care.

When asked how they perceived their role, counsellors revealed that they saw themselves as role models and a source of social capital for their campers. Participants wanted to be someone that campers could look up to or feel safe around, someone that campers could go to if they had any problems, or just wanted to talk. One of my participants Ian, explained that growing

up he always looked up to his coaches and the teachers in his life. He knew that when he grew up and began his teaching career that he wanted to emulate what he learned from his adult role models. Ian then explained that, as a camp counsellor, he knows that he has the opportunity to positively influence a child's life. Other participants felt the same way. Rory similarly explains that, when working with youth, she tries to recognize the importance of her job and how significant her role as a counsellor may be in the lives of her campers. Regardless of how difficult a camp counsellor's day may be, each participant conveyed their love for their job and how they simply want to be someone campers can look up to and learn from.

Throughout my research, I learned that some camp counsellors felt that they needed to essentially 'save' certain campers from their home life and make their camp experience as happy and carefree as possible. Participants mentioned that they wanted camp to be a place where youth could forget their struggles at home and simply have fun. When I first started out as a camp counsellor and many years later, I found myself striving to do this as well. I knew certain campers were struggling at home more than others, and I tried my best to keep them happy and engaged throughout the day. Participants explained that they wanted to create an environment where campers do not have to worry about what is going on in their outside world. They want their camper's day to be fulfilling and fun without any worries. From personal experience, I found being a camp counsellor rewarding, as did my co-workers. I would often reflect on my day and be proud of how I handled situations, or the lessons that I gave my campers, whether that be the importance of inclusiveness, or simply sharing ideas, toys, or craft supplies with others. In addition, camp counsellors saw 'caretaking' as a vital component of their role. Many mentioned the importance of creating safe spaces and the significance of getting to know each camper's personality and what works best for them.

Overall, it was evident from participant narratives that they conceptualized the role of camp counsellor to encompass caretaking, role modelling, acting as a source of social capital, and creating safe spaces for campers. Counsellors understood the importance of their roles and the impact that they can have on young people. Day camp staff also explained how the YMCA value beads program helped them convey important values and lessons to campers, which I will discuss in the next section.

Neoliberal Values and YMCA Programming

A major theme explored in my thesis was the considerable degree to which the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism informs YMCA day camp programming. This theme was revealed in conversations with participants about the challenges they faced when working at camp and how they overcame them. The value beads program is a unique feature of YMCA day camp programs. The value beads program is essentially a rewards-based initiative where campers receive beads for demonstrating the YMCA's core values of respect, responsibility, inclusiveness, caring, honesty, and health. If a camper is showing these values through positive behaviours, they will receive a bead as a reward. Each of my participants conveyed how much they enjoyed the value beads program as it helped in challenging situations, for example, when campers are misbehaving or are not taking part in activities. Obviously, not all campers are motivated by the value beads program, but many children are, and it works to keep challenging campers engaged.

When examining the value beads program from a sociological standpoint, it is clear that there are neo-liberal influences that undergird this programmatic measure. As Hillman (2016) highlights, there are three core neoliberal values: competition, entrepreneurship, and self-regulation. When it comes to the camp context, competition and self-regulation are prevalent.

Moreover, entrepreneurialism is also encouraged in the value beads program as children are rewarded when they take initiative and continue to strive to accumulate beads, standing out from their peers and ultimately improving themselves and their behaviour.

Campers are constantly engaging in various games and activities that involve competition. Campers are also expected to self-regulate. If certain campers are struggling with self-regulation, this is often where the value beads program comes in. The value beads program has embedded neoliberal values which teaches children that if they behave according to externally imposed standards, they will be rewarded, and if they are misbehaving and not demonstrating desired values, they will not receive anything. This echoes the neo-liberal disposition, as in the capitalistic society in which we live, if you do not go to school, get a job and work hard, you are considered socially unfit. If you adhere to dominant capitalist values, you are likely to be accepted and more successful in a neoliberal world. The YMCA uses the value beads program to teach campers the importance of hegemonically desirable life skills that they can use outside of the camp environment to become respectable individuals.

Each participant agreed that they did use the value beads program to regulate the behaviour of campers. They found that campers who were interested in the program would often behave if they were reminded that they could receive a bead for good behaviour. From personal experience, I have had campers who really excel when they know that they will receive something in exchange for being respectful and listening to their counsellor. Some kids would come back to camp telling me that they took what they were learning at camp home and that their parents were impressed. This, in turn, made them excited to continue demonstrating good behaviour, which made me feel accomplished in my position. Not only were campers being respectful and listening to me, but they wanted to continue these behaviours at home.

Accordingly, the participants in my study all agreed that they have used the value beads program as a tool to regulate the camper's behaviour.

Recognition of Home life, Strengths and Assets

Camp counsellors agreed that what is going on in a camper's home life may affect the way they are behaving at camp. Many participants mentioned that the YMCA often caters to low-income youth and a lot of campers have a tough home life. Whether this be, poverty, living in a single-parent household, parental drug/alcohol use, or having to take care of their siblings, campers can be going through a lot behind the scenes. Without knowing the camper's situation at home, it is almost impossible to understand what they may be going through. Some children are so resilient and have positive attitudes, not letting what is going on outside of camp affect their experience. There are also campers who are visibly struggling, whether this be from the lack of sleep at home, not being able to eat breakfast, or having to get their siblings ready for camp because their guardian needed to leave for work. As a camp counsellor it is unsettling to hear about what some campers are going through at a young age. Ian explained that he has had campers who would wake up with no parent present in their home, having to scrounge for food in the morning, not knowing if they got to sleep in a bed at night. As camp counsellors, it is easy to get caught up in the daily challenges that working with kids brings, but we always need to remember that we may not really know what a camper is going through and what they face when they leave the YMCA.

While children can face challenges at home, it is critical to recognize that there are also empowering influences in kids' homes and communities, and campers of diverse backgrounds possess unique strengths and assets. Recognizing campers' strengths and assets seemed to be somewhat lacking among study participants. In regards to campers' strengths and assets,

participants often mentioned that campers were resilient, outgoing, were able to have fun at camp regardless of their home life, but there was little recognition of the strengths and assets that young people bring from their homes and communities. Yosso (2005) outlines the community cultural wealth that marginalized youth bring to the various aspects of their lives which often goes unrecognized, is frequently not taken seriously, or viewed through a neoliberal, middle-class lens, and framed as deficiency. Counsellors tended to focus on the perceived negative traits associated with low-income, marginalized campers. Participants tended to dwell on how difficult their home life may be and how their home life affects their behaviour at camp. Yet, there are many strengths and assets, and examples of community cultural wealth, that young people may have that are rarely recognized or considered. Yosso (2005) explains the different forms of capital that marginalized youth can embody aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, and navigational. Children from marginalized communities with different forms of capital and community cultural wealth are frequently undervalued, as their communities are often viewed as pathological or deficient. When asked about what strengths and assets children brought to camp, counsellors did not mention anything resonant of the various forms of capital that Yosso identifies. Not recognizing marginalized youth's strengths can further pathologize their communities and put young people in a position where they are viewed as individuals that are unable to achieve in life due to their sociocultural circumstances and perceived cultural deficiencies.

Children have numerous strengths and assets as fostered in their homes and communities, and counsellors must try their best to build on these in order to create a rewarding and inclusive environment for all campers. My study revealed that camp counsellors focus little on the strengths and assets that young people bring from their communities and more on what they may

be going through at home and how these experiences negatively affect their daily lives. Instead, by way of programming initiatives such as the beads program, there is an emphasis on molding youth into neoliberal citizens. In this vein, some study participants exhibited somewhat of a ‘savior’ disposition whereby they viewed themselves as having a responsibility to instill in kids’ values that would counter those emphasized within their homes and communities. While teaching values such as cooperation and courteous behaviour are certainly desirable, it is important to understand why young people, particularly those marginalized by race and class, might exhibit resistant or oppositional behaviours. As marginalized youth grow older, adherence to neoliberal values is unlikely to benefit them as it would young people from more privileged social locations. A politicized critical consciousness is therefore vital if they are to contextualize their lived experience, overcome challenges, and pursue progressive change (Gosine & Islam, 2014; Gosine & Tabi, 2016; Hess, 2019; Yosso, 2005). As Yosso (2005) argues, it is pivotal that dominant institutions acknowledge and engage marginalized youth’s knowledge, skills, abilities, and community cultural wealth, including their resistant disposition, “in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice” (p. 69).

It is evident from this research that camp counsellors are generally a dedicated group of workers who care deeply about youth. We would frequently sit together after work and de-brief. These informal sessions would entail a discussion of different strategies on how to handle certain campers’ behaviours, how to make them more comfortable, and ultimately improve their camp experience. Whenever we would have a training session with camp staff around the Greater Toronto Area, the general manager would explain how camp staff are a special group of individuals who genuinely care about the children we work with. Not only do we create long-lasting relationships with each other, our relationships with youth still resonate with staff years

after their first summer at camp. In addition, YMCA day camps can also benefit youth of diverse backgrounds in many ways. Children are taught many transferable skills in the camp environment, such as teamwork, sharing, caring for others around you, inclusivity, and more. Furthermore, the YMCA is dedicated to providing everyone with a camp experience through subsidy programs and financial aid. Campers also have the opportunity to connect with and create relationships with adults outside of their home and immediate social circles. At the same time, given the increasing diversity of the youth who take part in these programs, it might be time to rethink programming that entails the imposition of neoliberal standards on young people who, owing to varied and intersecting social locations, differ in the ways in which they experience the world.

APPENDIX

Semi- Structured Interview Guide

Opening Questions

1. How old are you?
2. What is your ethnic background?
3. How would you describe your social class background?
4. What drove you to apply for a position working with children?
5. Is there a specific reason why you chose a job working with youth?
6. Why did you decide to apply to be a camp counsellor? What attracted you to work for the YMCA specifically?
7. Please explain your position working with YMCA Day Camps
8. How many summers did you work as a day camp counsellor for the YMCA?
 - If counsellor has worked with the YMCA for multiple summers:
 - What made you return to work as a camp counsellor for another summer?
9. What is the training process?
10. How would you describe the general demographic profile of the kids who enroll in the day camp (in terms of social class, race, gender, etc)? Do you work with a diverse group of kids?
11. What does a typical day look like as a day camp counsellor?
12. Explain the orientation process when you meet the kids on the first day? What do you say to them? What sorts of 'ice breaker' activities do you undertake with them?
13. How much freedom do you have when deciding what to do with your campers? Are you largely free to work with the kids as you please *or* are you, for the most part, following a programming agenda prescribed? Is programming fairly standardized?
14. As a camp counsellor did you ever have a difficult moment with a young camper? If so, what happened and how did you deal with the matter?
15. Have you ever worked with a young person with whom you just weren't able to connect or get through to? If so, why do you think that was?

YMCA Mission Statement

1. I know that the YMCA has a specific mission statement, do you know about this statement? *if NOT read participant the YMCA's current mission statement*:
"The YMCA is a charitable organization that strengthens our community by providing opportunities for personal growth and active involvement for all children, adults and families"
2. When working as a camp counsellor, what are the most important aspects of the mission statement?
3. Do you have any thoughts on the mission statement?

YMCA Value Beads Program

1. I also know that YMCA day camps align themselves with a value beads program, can you please explain what it consists of?
2. What do you believe the value beads program is designed to do?

3. As a camp counsellor do you believe that using YMCA value beads is important?
4. How do the campers react to the program?

Youth Work Philosophy

1. How do you perceive your role as a camp counsellor?
2. What constitutes a successful camp experience for campers?
3. What strategies do you use to enhance experiences for campers?
4. What strategies do you use to make the camp environment inclusive for all children?
Have you ever encountered campers who had trouble fitting into camp? If so, why do you think that was?
5. To what extent do you feel a need to learn about the communities or home environments of campers? What sorts of challenges do you suspect they face in their day-to-day lives?
Is such knowledge typically deemed important when working with youth in the camp context?
6. As far as you've observed, what unique qualities or assets do young campers bring to camp?
7. To what degree are campers' unique abilities, qualities and interests integrated into programming?
8. Ultimately, what would you like to see kids take away from the camp experience? As a counsellor are there any specific values you aim to instill or qualities you wish to help campers cultivate? Are there specific values or qualities that the 'Y' wishes to foster?
9. How are camp counsellors evaluated? How do you go about reflecting on your own performance as a counsellor? In what ways have your youth work practices evolved over time and what have been the driving factors involved that evolution?
10. Explain the downfalls of working as a camp counsellor?
11. What is most rewarding about working with YMCA day camps?
12. We've now reached the end of the interview. Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share?

REFERENCES

- Allen, L., Cox, J., & Cooper, N. (2013). The impact of a summer day camp on the resiliency of disadvantaged youths. *Journal of Physical Recreation & Dance*, 77(1), 17-23.
- Amatea, E., West-Olatunji, C. (2007). Joining the conversation about educating our poorest children: emerging leadership roles for school counsellors in high-poverty schools. *Professional School Counselling*, 11(2), 81-89.
- Anderson-Butcher, D., Cash, S., Saltzburg, S., Midle, T., & Pace, D. (2004). Institutions of youth development: The significance of supportive staff-youth relationships. *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, 9(1-2), 83-99.
- Baker, M. (2018). Welcome to the bubble: Experiences of liminality and communities among summer camp counsellors. *Journal of Youth Development*, 13 (1-2), 24-42.
- Barman-Adhikari, A., Bowen, E., Bender, K., Rice, E. (2016). A social capital approach to identifying correlates of perceived social support among homeless youth. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 45(5), 691-708.
- Baylis, K., Gong, Y., & Wang, S. (2018). Bridging versus bonding social capital and the management of common pool resources. *Land Economics*, 94(4), 614-631.
- Bernard, R. (2016). The rewards of teaching music in urban settings. *Music Educators Journal*, 96(3), 53-57.
- Bialeschki, D., Henderson, K., & Dahowski, K. (1998). Camp gives staff a world of good. *Camping Magazine*, 71(5), 27-31.
- Bottrell, D. (2007). Resistance, resilience, and social identities: Reframing 'problem youth' and the problem of schooling. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10(5), 597-616.

- Browne, L., & D'Eloia, M. (2016). Toward a model of camp staff engagement: A look at university-based day camps. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 34(4), 5-19.
- Burdette, H., Whitaker, R. (2005). Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking beyond fitness and fatness to attention, affiliation, and affect. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 159(1), 46-50.
- Chu, B., Guarino, D., Mele, C., O'Connell, J., & Coto, P. (2019). Developing an online early detection system for school attendance problems: Results from a research-community partnership. *Cognitive and Behavioural Practice*, 26(1), 35-45.
- Claridge, T. (2018). Functions of social capital- bonding, bridging, linking. *Social Capital Research*, 1-7.
- DeGraaf, D., & Glover, J. (2003). Long-term impacts of working at an organized camp for seasonal staff. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 21(1), 1-20.
- Diorio, G. (1998). *The YMCA as a civil society organization: Purpose, program, and policy* (Publication No. 1413640) [Master's thesis, Eastern College]. ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
- Elliot, J. (2005). *The Researcher as narrator: Reflexivity in qualitative and quantitative research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Elliot, R., Timulak, L. (2005). Descriptive and interpretive approaches to qualitative research. In J, Miles, & P, Gilbert (Eds.), *Handbook of Research Methods for Clinical and Health Counselling* (pp.147-157). Oxford: Oxford Press.
- Fields, D. (2008). What do students gain from a week at science camp? Youth perceptions and the research design of an immersive, research oriented astronomy camp. *International Journal of Science Education*, 31(2), 151-171.

- Flick, U. (2007). Quality in qualitative research. *Designing Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Flouri, E., Midouhas, E. (2016). School composition, family poverty and child behaviour. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 51(6), 817-826).
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of acting white". *The Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206
- Gibson, W., Brown, A. (2011). *Working with Qualitative Data*. Sage Publications.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857029041>
- Gordon, E. (2013). Under-served and un-deserving: Youth empowerment programs, poverty discourses and subject formation. *Geoforum*, 50, 107-116.
- Gosine, K. (2021). Reconciling divergent realms in the lives of marginalized students. In F. Blaikie (Ed.), *Visual and Cultural Identity Constructs of Global Youth and Young Adults*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gosine, K., & Islam, F. (2014). "It's Like We're One Big Family": Marginalized young people, community, and the implications for urban schooling. *School Community Journal*, 24(2), 33-61.
- Gosine, K., & Tabi, E. (2016). Disrupting neoliberalism and bridging the multiple worlds of marginalized youth via hip-hop pedagogy: Contemplating possibilities. *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 38, 445-467.
- Grossman, J., Bulle, M. (2006). Review of what youth programs do to increase the connectedness of youth with adults. *J Adolesc Health*, 39(6), 788-799.
- Henderson, K., Bialeschki, D., & James, P. (2007). Overview of camp research. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 16(4), 755-767.

- Henderson, K., Bialeschki, D., Scanlin, M., Thurber, C., Whitaker, L., & Marsh, P. (2006). Components of camp experiences for positive youth development. *Journal of Youth Development, 1*(3), 15-26.
- Hess, J. (2019). Moving beyond resilience education: Musical counterstorytelling. *Music Education Research, 21*(5), 488-502.
- Hillman, M. (2016). Youth mentorship as neoliberal subject formation. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies, 7* (3-4), 364-380.
- Jacobson, D., Mustafa, N. (2019). Social identity map: A reflexivity tool for practicing explicit positionality in critical qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*(1-12).
- James, C. (2011). Students “at-risk”: Stereotypes and schooling of black boys. *Urban Education, 47*(2), 464-494.
- Jarrett, R., Sullivan, P., & Watkins, N. (2004). Developing social capital through participation in organized youth programs: Qualitative insights from three programs. *Journal of Community Psychology, 41*-55.
- Kainz, K., Lippold, M., Sabatine, E., Datus, R. (2017). A systemic intervention research agenda for reducing inequality in school outcomes. *Journal of Children and Poverty, 24*(1), 69-80.
- Kennelly, J. (2011). *Citizen youth: Culture, activism and agency in a neoliberal era: Education, Politics and Public life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kidd, S., Miner, S., Walker, D., Davidson, L. (2007). Stories of working with homeless youth: On being “mind-boggling”. *Children and Youth Services Review, 29*(1),16-34.

- Learned, J. (2016). "The behaviour kids": Examining the conflation of youth reading difficulty and behaviour problem positioning among school institutional contexts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(5), 1271-1309.
- Lukianoff, G. & Haidt, J. (2018). *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Lune, H., Berg, B. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Mainieri, T., & Denise, A. (2015). "There was more out there than our street": Exploring summer camp programming as a context to foster social capital and civic engagement after camp. *Research in Outdoor Education*, 13, 38-58.
- Marshall, B., Astone, N., Blum, R., Jejeebhoy, S., Delany-Moretlwe, S., Brahmabhatt, H., Olumide, A., Wang, Z. (2014). Social capital and vulnerable urban youth in five global cities. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 55(6), S21-S30.
- Meier, J., & Henderson, K. (2012). *Camp counseling: Leadership and programming for the organized camp*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Muukkonen, M. (2002). *Ecumenism of the laity: Continuity and change in the mission view of the world's alliance of young men's Christian associations, 1855-1955*. Finland: University of Joensuu.
- Nabors, L., Hines, A., & Monnier, L. (2008). Evaluation of an incentive system at a summer camp for youth experience homelessness. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 24 (2), 17-30.

- Patel, M., Liddel, J., & Ferreira, R. (2018). An evaluation of the positive action program for violence prevention: From schools to summer camps. *Children and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 35(5), 519-530.
- Phelan, P., Davidson, A., & Cao, H. (1991). Students multiple worlds: Negotiating the boundaries of family, peer and cultures. *Anthropology, Education Quarterly*, 22(3), 224-250.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Raddon, M., & Harrison, B. (2015). Is service learning the kind of face of the neo-liberal university? *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 45(2), 134-153.
- Rankin, J., K. Rushowy, and L. Brown. 2013, March 22. "Toronto School Suspension Rates Highest for Black and Aboriginal Students." *Toronto Star*.
https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/03/22/toronto_school_suspension_rates_highest_for_black_and_aboriginal_students.html
- Rigg, K., McNeish, R., Schadrac, D., Gonzalez, A., & Tran, Q. (2019). Community needs of minority male youth living in inner-city Chicago. *Children and Youth Services*, 98, 284-289.
- Ross, M. (1951). *The ymca in Canada: The chronicle of a century*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press.
- Saldana, J., Leavy, P. (2020). Qualitative Data Analysis Strategies. In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2, 1-44.
- Schelbe, L., Hansen, M., France, V., Rony., M., Twichell, K. (2018). Does camp make a difference?: Camp counselors' perceptions how camp impacted youth. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 93, 441-450.

- Schwandt, T. (1998). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (p. 118-137). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Smith, B. (2000). Marginalized youth, delinquency, and education: The need for critical-interpretive research. *The Urban Review*, 32(3), 293-312.
- Sriskandarajah, A. (2019). Cultural mixers: Race, space and intercultural relations among youth in east-end Toronto. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 44(3), 257-282.
- Thurber, C., Scanlin, M., Scheuler, L., & Henderson, K. (2007). Youth development outcomes of the camp experience: Evidence for multidimensional growth. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 36(3), 241-254.
- Wadsworth, D. (2001). Why new teachers choose to teach. *Educational Leadership*, 58(8), 24-28.
- Wahl-Alexander, Z., Richards, A., & Washburn, N. (2017). Changes in perceived burnout among camp staff across the summer camp season. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 35(2), 74-85.
- Whitacre, J., & Farmer, J. (2013). How come the best job I ever had was when I worked at a summer camp? Understanding retention among camp counselors. *Journal of Youth Development*, 8(2), 1-12.
- Whitley, M., Forneris, T., & Barker, B. (2015). The reality of sustaining community-based sport and physical activity programs to enhance the development of underserved youth: Challenges and potential strategies. *National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education*, 67(4), 409-423.

- Whitson, R. (2017). Painting pictures of ourselves: Researcher subjectivity in the practice of feminist reflexivity. *The Professional Geographer*, 69(2), 299-306.
- YMCA GTA. (2017, n.d). *Diversity and Social Inclusion*. Retrieved from <https://ymcagta.org/about-us/diversity-and-social-inclusion>
- YMCA. (2018, March 2). *YMCA named one of Canada's best diversity employers for seventh consecutive year*. YMCAgta. <https://ymcagta.org/news/ymca-of-greater-toronto-named-one-of-the-best-diversity-employers-for-seventh-consecutive-year>.
- YMCA. (n.d). *Our History*. YMCA Canada. <https://ymca.ca/Who-We-Are/YMCA-History>.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.
- Zald, M., Denton, P. (1963). From Evangelism to General Service: The Transformation of the YMCA. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 8(2), 214-234.