Rethinking Outdoor Leaders

Mandi Baker
University of the Sunshine Coast
Introduction
Today’s content

- Getting the terms straight
- Benefits of outdoor experiences
- A new approach
- My Study
- Outdoor leaders
- Conclusions
- Implications
“Camp”
Getting the terms straight
Preaching to the choir

- Benefit research on camp experiences
- Benefit research limits the kinds of experiences that can be reported and ignores the expression of embodied experiences
- Critical research is raising questions about how well camp experiences serve diverse populations
A new approach

- Power exists everywhere and is exercised through and in relationships (Marshall 1997)

- Discourses shape the way we think and behave

- By adopting a post-structuralist approach, my research opens up possibilities for examining the way camp discourses shape the construction of camper experiences and how these are embodied
My Study

Research Design

Findings

• Discourses shape camp experiences and selves

• Everyday power and processes of subjectification work to create and maintain ideals of camp employees

• Emotion work of camp counsellors is demanding and has effects on wellbeing
Outdoor Leaders

What makes a “good” leader?

• Personal qualities (e.g., maturity, positive, awareness and responsible)
• Behaviours (e.g., hard work, role model, being prepared, team player, fun)
• Roles (e.g., “foster parent, teacher, friend, confidante, taskmaster, and model” Meier & Mitchell 1993, p.45)
What makes a "good" leader?

- **Personal qualities** (e.g., maturity, positive, awareness and responsible)
- **Behaviours** (e.g., hard work, role model, being prepared, team player, fun)
- **Roles** (e.g., "foster parent, teacher, friend, confidante, taskmaster, and model"

Meier & Mitchell 1993, p.45)
Psychologist

- Language (i.e., self-esteem) permeates camp culture with the therapeutic value of personal benefits
- This frames campers as deficient and positions counsellors as a therapist to remedy these
- “...she went off the deep end...” but “…the kid stays at camp” (Henry)
Pastor

• Leaders who put others’ needs above their own
• “sacrifice” and “selflessness”
• Regardless of the tensions of putting the needs of campers first, camp counsellors are expected to “serve” the needs of campers “no matter what’s going on” because “the camper comes first” (Terri)
Parent

• Camper care “forces you to really work hard, to be responsible and aware of everything that was going on” (Eric)

• Responsibility of camper care appears in parenting metaphors

• Fun can obscure the realities of being in charge of many children at once
Pedagogy

• Parents concerns for their children’s future success increases the importance of activities to contribute to their child’s future life and work skills

• The educational benefits of the outdoors are often assumed
Brainstorm

What makes a ‘good’ outdoor leader?

What ‘roles’ are required of outdoor leaders?

What challenges does this create for your operation?
Conclusions

• Camp staff must embody or ‘become’ camp leader rather than simply perform it

• The roles discursively prescribed for camp counsellors places immense pressure on youthful employees

• Rethink the emotional expectations of these roles
Implications

• A need for reflexive approaches to management practices in regards to recruitment, retention and emotional wellbeing of employees and campers

• Training programs, staff inductions and policies need to better prepare and support camp employees for the roles of their employment
Thank you for listening.

Any questions?
References


