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"It's Camp": Summer Camp Culture, the Renegotiation of Social Norms and Regulation of  
Gender and Sexuality

by

Penny Harvey

Under the Direction of Katie Acosta, PhD

ABSTRACT

Summer camps are an important part of U.S culture. 11 million children attend summer camp in the U.S.A each year. Yet, little work has been done to explore the cultural phenomenon of summer camp. At summer camps, there are many implicit and explicit norms regarding sexuality and gender. These norms, in turn, have larger implications for understanding children's development of self, their gender identity, and sexuality. I study summer camp culture at Camp Delaware by interviewing former campers (often referred to as ex-campers) about their experiences. I investigate how summer camp culture both reconstructs and reifies social norms, particularly those surrounding gender and sexuality. Summer camps are an under-researched, yet highly important part of U.S culture. It is important we begin to understand how gender and sexuality function in these spaces, so we can replicate the positive effects and work to overcome the negative outcomes of such a unique locale.

INDEX WORDS: Gender, Sexuality, Culture, Summer Camps

"It's Camp": Summer Camp Culture, the Renegotiation of Social Norms and Regulation of  
Gender and Sexuality

by

Penny Harvey

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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2017

"It's Camp": Summer Camp Culture, the Renegotiation of Social Norms and Regulation of  
Gender and Sexuality

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December 2017

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

"Any group of persons - prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients - develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it."

(Goffman, 1959:ix-x)

Every summer, 11 million children pack their bags and head off to summer camp (ACA Camp Compensation and Benefits Report, 2010). Some head to day camps, some head to sleepaway camps, some are gone for just a week, while others are away for the whole summer. At camp, there are no parents, no adults (except those under the guise of camp counselors), and home often seems a million miles away. It is a cultural haven: a place where anything can happen (Paris, 2008). Summer camps are an important part of U.S culture. Within the field of sociology, cultural studies and broader social sciences, little to no work has been done to explore the cultural phenomenon of summer camp. At summer camps, there are many implicit and explicit norms regarding sexuality and gender that are reproduced in a multitude of ways. These norms, in turn, have larger implications for understanding children's development of self, their gender identity, and sexuality. For this thesis, I study summer camp culture at Camp Delaware<sup>1</sup> by interviewing former campers (often referred to as ex-campers) about their experiences. I investigate how summer camp culture both reconstructs and reifies social norms, particularly those surrounding gender and sexuality.

I draw on Goffman's theory of total institutions as well as his analysis of frontstage and backstage spaces as a way of understanding the norms and unwritten rules enacted by children and staff at summer camp. In addition, I utilise feminist theories of gender performance to explore the ways in which gendered identities are presented differently at summer camp.

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the camp has been changed to protect the identities of the participants

Moreover, my findings demonstrate that hegemonic masculinity norms are particularly integral to teenage boys' experience at Camp Delaware, therefore I draw on Connell (1995, 2005) and Pascoe (2003, 2005) to unpack the meanings behind the presentations of masculinity at camp. My findings also reaffirm the importance of contact with queer<sup>2</sup> people, not only for acceptance from straight and cis people but for the self-acceptance of young queer persons. These theoretical frameworks help to understand how camp culture functions summer. These frameworks provide insight into how social norms can be renegotiated and given new meanings with relative ease. Moreover, the implicitly gendered and sexed social norms demonstrates the pervasive nature of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity in U.S. social life.

The goal of this project is to critically address how summer camps can impact the identities of many children who attend summer camp. Summer camps are an under-researched, yet highly important part of U.S culture. It is important we begin to understand how gender and sexuality function in these spaces, so we can replicate the positive effects and work to overcome the negative outcomes of such a unique locale.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

For this study, I focus on three areas of summer camp culture. First, how are the rituals and norms that are re-created at Camp Delaware (a pseudonym) understood by former campers? Second, how do former campers conceptualise and understand the differences in their gendered behaviours at Camp Delaware compared to their behaviours at home? Third, how do former campers conceptualise and understand the differences in their sexual or sexualised behaviours at Camp Delaware compared to their behaviours at home?

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<sup>2</sup> I am using queer as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual identities as some of my participants did not necessarily identify as LGBTQ

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Total Institutions

I argue that summer camp is a total institution; a place that is remote and removed from the rest of society, with a structured schedule and set of rules, and limited contact with the outside world (Goffman, 1968). Goffman (1968) defines a total institution as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society for an appreciable period, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life"(Goffman, 1968: xxi). Goffman (1968) argues that prisons serve as a clear example. Other examples Goffman highlights include monasteries, work camps, mental health facilities and boarding schools. Summer camps, particularly sleepaway camps, fit Goffman's (1968) description. Goffman's (1968) concept of total institutions is most commonly applied to involuntary institutions such as prisons, mental health facilities and elderly care facilities. However, as Goffman (1968) highlights, the total institutions framework can also be applied to more voluntary institutions such as boarding schools or monasteries. When Goffman (1968) classifies total institutions; summer camps, which fit the criteria for a total institution, are most akin to his example of boarding schools. Summer camps also fit into the "retreats from the world" group, the category he applies to monasteries (Davies, 1989; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2007; Vrooman, 2007; Cookson & Persell, 2008; Zweigenhaft, 2012).Goffman (1968) asserts that an essential characteristic of society is that people sleep, play, and work in different locales, all with different people and organising structures (Goffman, 1968: 313). However, in total institutions, all of these happen in the same place. Additionally, each member has similar daily activities and expectations. Further, the days are tightly scheduled and sequenced. All of these activities are aimed towards the final goal(s) of the institution. Total institutions and therefore summer camps are also an "idioculture"

where new systems of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs that are shared by a small group are formed (Fine, 1979). Meanings are constructed that often have implications for gender and sexuality (Hall, 1993; Zaitzow and Thomas, 2003).

A key feature of total institutions is the binary separation of inmates and staff (Goffman, 1968). Goffman (1968) argues that there is a power dynamic; the hierarchy creates clear effects, which were demonstrated in the Stanford prison experiment (Zimbardo et al., 1972). In summer camps, the hierarchical order is a more complex three or four-tiered system. There are the “base inmates” who in this example are the children. Goffman (1986) defined base inmates as residents who have limited power and limited to no contact with the world outside of the institution. Campers get letters from parents, two phone calls a month and one visiting day during their time in the institution. Then there are the “secondary inmates”, the counselors. Though the counselors have slightly more freedom and power, they have little autonomy and choice concerning decisions and when they can and cannot leave the premises. They also have restricted contact with the world outside camp, though they often are allowed more contact than the children. The tier two supervisors are the administrative staff. They have substantially more freedom and choice over what rules they enforce. Supervisors can be socially integrated with the outside world as they have unrestricted contact. They can freely use cell phones, the Internet, and can return to their homes on off days. However, the camp directors or manager (the tier one or full supervisors) are only regulated by existing governing bodies, though this is not constant and direct supervision. The directors and managers have full integration with the outside world. Though they live at the summer camp they have their own house with WIFI, television, and carry cellphones around camp. Irwin and Cressey (1962) assert, that in total institutions, new value

systems are created that are situationally related. Therefore, because total institutions allow for the new systems and new rules to be created, social norms can be renegotiated.

## **2.2 Culture and Summer Camp**

Understanding culture is central to our understanding of society (Mills, 1959). Sociology of culture covers a wide range of sociological material. For this study I utilise Mead (1934), Simmel (1997) and Hall (1993) to inform my understanding of the significance of culture and cultural interactions at summer camp. There are many approaches to the study of culture, for this project, I focus on symbolic culture which is the meanings we attribute to language, symbols, interaction and rituals (Mead, 1934; Simmel 1997). According to Simmel (1997), there are two types of symbolic culture. Subjective culture, the ability to embrace culture and objective culture that is separate from the group's control. Simmel (1997) argues that we need culture to interact with each other. Mead (1934) argues that meaning emerges out of interaction. To understand culture, it is important to not only examine the culture but understand the meanings understood from the cultural practices. Hall (1993) argues that meaning must be constructed and that culture is the point where social groups develop rituals and give meaning to everyday actions and experiences. When groups establish a distinctive way of doing things that are unique to that social group, culture forms (Hall, 1993).

At summer camp, culture is created out of cumulative and repeated interactions that create greater and symbolic meanings. Summer camp culture is thus created out of these continuous and repeated interactions that, in many ways, become ingrained in the summer camp experience. An example of subjective culture in summer camps is wearing camp apparel. An example of objective culture is campfires. Though campfires (and s'mores) are synonymous with summer camps, any individual could have campfires anywhere and thus participate in this culture as the

culture is no longer owned by the place where it formed. In small communities, culture can remain subjective. Simmel (1997) also argues that culture is necessary to achieve goals in a social setting. The purpose of attending camp is to integrate, socialise, and participate in the summer camp experience. A secondary goal (often from parents) is to network and make bonds with peers that may assist them later in life. Since a fixed meaning is less ingrained in children, it is easier in a new environment to recreate meaning of particular acts and rituals. Acts can have different meanings or manifestations across different summer camps.

### **2.3 Gender and Sexuality Norms**

Gender and sexuality codes are undeniably present in U.S society (Rudman and Glick, 2001; Cvencek and Greenwald, 2011; Baron et al., 2014; Weeks, 2014). However, total institutions allow for the values and codes to be modified, free from normal societal pressures. The “doing” or indeed “undoing” of gender and sexuality in a total institution, such as summer camps, can become more fluid depending on the demands of the institution (Keys, 2002; West and Zimmerman, 2009; Butler, 2004). This calls into question whether gender and sexuality values and codes are reflective of societal norms or renegotiated in these spaces. In summer camps, much of the day-to-day schedule and regulations reinforce notions of gender. Summer camp routines are mirrored in Durant and Knottnerus's (1999) work on plantations as total institutions, where the nature of work given to slaves reinforced certain notions of gender. Yet, in total institutions, creating new norms can allow the boundaries of gender to become flexible and renegotiated; this is particularly notable in prison (Zaitzow and Thomas, 2003). The isolated nature of total institutions combined with the ability to create social norms means that sexuality norms are also often redefined. Research shows that the recreation of sexuality norms are frequently illustrated in prisons and boarding schools where people are in single-sex institutions

(Zaitzow and Thomas, 2003; Hensley, 2000; Keys 2002). Though Camp Delaware is not single sex, there are plenty of single-sex activities, and thus there is heavy homosociality in these spaces. Therefore, in analysing Camp Delaware as a total institution, I unpack gender and sexuality norms and begin to understand why they form in the ways they do at summer camp. Our interaction with people and our “definition of the situation” affects the ways in which our gendered and sexual selves are shaped (Goffman, 1978; Thomas, 1927; Butler, 1988). In total institutions, the definition of the situation is more flexible than in regular society (Scott, 2010). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that gender and sexuality codes are renegotiated under these unique circumstances. However, it is important to remember the power of hegemonic gender and sexuality systems (West and Fenstermaker, 1995; Moore, 2001). Even within this uniquely removed locale, the pervasiveness of the patriarchy and heteronormativity may prevail (Moore, 2001; Fenstermaker and West, 2002). Despite summer camps being total institutions, with the ability to have flexible notions of gender and sexuality, hegemonic norms still permeate these spaces.

#### **2.4 Hegemonic Masculinity**

Dominant expressions of gender are often referred to as hegemonic masculinity or femininity (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is the maintenance of men's dominance of or superiority over women in society (Connell, 1995; Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). There are multiple kinds of masculinities with their own traits, characteristics, and utilisation of power.

Understanding the relational aspects of masculinities allows for the understanding of masculinity in a homogenous gender space (Connell, 1995). However, masculinities are hierarchical and therefore some forms of masculinity (i.e hegemonic masculinity) has more cultural value than other masculinities. It is also important to note that the meanings of different masculinities can

change depending on cultural context. Hegemonic masculinity is performed differently in the United States than it is in European countries, for example. Pascoe (2003) asks what are the lived experiences of boys in U.S society today? How central is gender to their identity and how are they continuing to perform masculinity despite current calls to question gender hierarchies? Pascoe (2003) also asserts that masculinity is being destabilised. Perhaps the destabilization of hegemonic masculinity is leading to the pressure to reclaim it in spaces that will allow it.

As Pascoe (2003) notes, the boys that have difficulty accessing hegemonic masculinity still try to mirror hegemonic masculinity in order to achieve some kind of acceptance. A key element of hegemonic masculinity is not only the dominance of men over women but also the existence of women as potential objects for men's sexual pleasure (Connell, 1995; Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). Therefore in spaces where hegemonic masculinity is ascribed to homosexuality or non-heterosexuality it threatens the values of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Higate, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity's power lies in its ability to become embedded into social institutions and is often desired as a part of male culture formation. It is hard to say whether it is individual men who make it part of male culture or the male culture that makes it part of men's desire / aspirations: perhaps it is both simultaneously. Nevertheless, built into many the rules and rituals of social institutions is the desire to meet hegemonic masculinity standards. On the other hand, hegemonic femininities are juxtaposed to hegemonic masculinities. As the women in the context of masculinity exists for the men's sexual pleasure, hegemonic femininity ensures women accommodate and perform in accordance with men's desires (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Linked to hegemonic masculinity is heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the cultural assumption that heterosexuality is natural, normal and expected (Jackson, 2006a). In addition, in

spaces that are hegemonically masculine, it is seen as the only legitimate and intelligible form of sexuality (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005). Sexuality can often not be disentangled from gender (Lucal, 1999; Jackson, 2006b). At Camp Delaware, gender segregation and the cultural pressures to engage in compulsory heterosexuality make it a difficult space to aspire to anything but hegemonic masculinity or femininity.

## **2.5 Regulation of Gender and Sexuality, Visibility and Contact Theory**

Many scholars note the impact of institutions on gender roles and sexuality (Zaitzow and Thomas, 2003; Hensley, 2000; Durant and Knottnerus, 1999). Gender and sexuality are not always regulated consistently throughout summer camp. In some areas, gender and sexuality are strictly regulated and non-normative / non-heterosexual identities are suppressed. However, as I will demonstrate, even the limited visibility of counselors or out campers have a positive effect on attitudes towards queer sexuality or gender. Contact theory argues that contact with an ‘othered’ group reduces stigma and prejudice often associated with this group (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). Since the 1950’s when this theory gained recognition, many studies have been done to address the empirical and testable value of contact theory for the LGBTQ community. To utilise contact theory, we have to understand the details of its function. The recent research has shown it is not as simple as just contact. The type of contact matters, variables include how the person they are having contact with is related to them, the view of the person before contact, the frequency of contact and the identity of the person they are having contact. All of the aforementioned variables affect how much contact with LGBTQ persons affects someone's attitudes towards the wider LGBTQ community (Costa et al., 2015; Cox et al., 2013; Garner, 2013). Furthermore, when addressing attitudes towards trans’ individuals, lack of prior contact was correlated with negative attitudes towards this population (Norton & Herek,

2013). However, attitudes were higher for contact with trans' people who 'passed' or fit into the gender binary than contact with those who did not fit in with traditional notions of gender (Norton & Herek, 2013). Interpersonal contact with gay or lesbian friends, family members or close co-workers has been shown to have a notably strong influence on support for LGBTQ rights and same-sex marriage (Herek 2003; Lewis 2011). At summer camps, non-normative sexuality and gender is often suppressed. Summer camps are a great place for contact and deep relationships to be formed without parents, especially when campers may not otherwise be exposed to such persons. However, the regulation of non-normative gender and sexuality can prevent these effects.

## **2.6 Gender, Sexuality and the Panopticon Effect**

I argue that the inconsistencies in the regulation of gender and sexuality is in part due to the panopticon effect. The panopticon effect is the idea of perceived surveillance. Foucault (1977), notably adapted the idea of the panopticon in prisons where the inmates do not know if they are being watched or not, so they act as if they are being watched. Eventually there is no need to watch people as they self-regulated in case surveillance occurs (Foucault, 1977). In society, surveillance is how norms and values are regulated. The panopticon effect of societal norms and values often means that gender and sexuality are regulated to reflect them. I argue that the "panopticon" effect means that gender and sexuality are regulated in ways that can contradict each other in frontstage and backstage settings at summer camp. The contrast between the frontstage and backstage aspects of Camp Delaware causes unusual norm development. I define frontstage spaces as anywhere outside of the cabins or bunks (Goffman 1978). Backstage spaces are within the cabin or bunks, as these are the places that are limited to those that sleep there, no other children from different age groups, genders, senior staff or counselors from outside the

division are allowed inside (Goffman, 1978). In these backstage spaces, there is not total privacy, but an unspoken agreement of privacy is created. Due to the difference of environment from the frontstage spaces, these areas act as backstage spaces (Goffman, 1978). In this case, the panopticon in frontstage spaces is regulating the norms of 'regular' society (Foucault, 1977; Goffman, 1978).

### 3 METHODS

I conducted ten in-depth interviews with former campers to examine the nuances of summer camp culture as they relate to social norms, notably those surrounding gender and sexuality. I have included my interview guide (see Appendix A), which details the questions that inform my study. The experiences of those I interviewed are not representative of all summer campers. However, this work begins to address summer camp as an important part of U.S culture. I myself have spent six summers working in the summer camp industry. I used my connections to form a purposive sample. The participants were four women and six men, all of whom were former campers who attended the same camp. They had all spent at least five summers at Camp Delaware with a combined 4,067 days at camp, almost 11 straight years, and an average of 8.2 summers each. They were selected as they had all recently attended camp and spent a considerable amount of time there but were over 18 and no longer attending camp.

#### 3.1 Sample and Data

Participants were recruited using a snowball sample from my own contacts with former campers. I began by sending out my recruitment script to the contacts I had and asked them to forward it to any contacts that met the recruitment criteria. By sampling this way, I was able to take advantage of my own personal network and, by association, the networks of those I knew. A purposive sample allowed me to access a typically hard to reach population (Bryman, 2008). Accessing campers or former campers can be difficult as it is a closed and insular group. In addition, focusing on former campers, whose camp experiences all derive from the same locale best allowed me to answer the research questions. Asking former campers to reflect critically on summer camp and its impact could feel invasive. Many campers are protective about their experiences (Moore, 2001; Chapeskie, 2008). However, I had already built up a rapport with

many of my respondents. Therefore, this sample provided depth to the data that may not be gained from a broader sample base that included people who had attended any camp. Camp Delaware as a whole is made up of equal boy and girl campers, although the numbers are uneven in some age groups. Camp Delaware is a seven-week Jewish sleepaway camp that recruits' children from the wealthier parts of New York and Southern Florida. Most of the campers (around 90 – 95%) are Jewish children, and the counselors are about 10% Jewish; most of the Jewish staff are former campers.

Ten interviews reached a reasonable point of saturation for such a small population. All of my participants attended camp within the last five years (at the time of interview) and had attended for at least five summers. My population to sample from was therefore around 150 to 200 former campers. Due to it being such a small population, I can only provide limited demographics (see appendix B). It provided me with enough data to compare and contrast experiences across gender and sexuality. Out of the sample, one man and one woman former camper did not identify as straight. I have omitted sexuality, age, and year-joined as these are such a small population, statistics like this could identify my participants. All names listed have been changed for confidentiality.

### **3.2 Research Design**

I provide a snapshot of possible experiences of people at Camp Delaware and demonstrate why an understanding of summer camp culture is important to sociology. In-depth interviews allowed me to have a greater breadth of coverage regarding how norms are renegotiated and how gender and sexuality norms are regulated (DiCicco-Bloom, 2006). In-depth interviews enabled me to ask specific questions and clarify responses to ensure a greater understanding of the data (Weiss, 2004). By conducting one-on-one interviews: I was able to build up a rapport and a non-

intimidating relationship with the participants (DiCicco-Bloom, 2006). I used Skype interviews so I could interview participants across a large geographic range. Skype interviews also meant that participants were able to participate in the interviews in their chosen surrounding. Being comfortable in an interview setting allowed me to build rapport and for the participant to feel open in talking about their experiences. Comfort is particularly important when discussing potentially sensitive topics. To ensure my participant's well-being, at the start of the interview I informed them I had a list of counselling resources, both national and local, should they want them.

I began each interview by asking about my participants' summer camp experience. I used a semi-structured interview format, as it allowed the conversation to evolve more naturally. I recorded the interviews with the permission of the participant. I transcribed the recordings myself to fully immerse myself in the data. I also made notes during and directly after each interview to be reflexive about my interpretations (Bryman, 2008). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours.

### **3.3 Variables for Analysis**

To assess the ways in which gender and sexuality norms are regulated and constructed, I began by asking questions about the broad experience of summer camp. As the interview progressed, I asked more specifically about the ways in which both gender and sexuality are regulated and enacted at summer camp. To understand the differences between frontstage and backstage spaces, I coded for experiences that occurred inside structured environments and those that took place inside the bunks. I explicitly asked about these different spaces in my interviews. In addition, I coded for gender and sexuality norms. In the end, four main themes emerged, each of which has several sub-themes. The themes are: *camp versus home*, in this section it details how

camp affects the presentation of self, perceived freedom, learning lessons and friendships; *norms, rituals and behaviours*, analysis on how status functions at camp and why camp is held as special or important to its participants; *gender at camp*, this includes the perceived (gendered) fairness of activities, the focus on boys when winning and hegemonic masculinity in the boys' teen house; *sexuality at camp*, in this section I address (sexual) firsts, and being openly queer at camp.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

I conducted a thematic analysis which allowed me to analyse data according to common themes across the interviews, I read through the data and let the themes emerge, as well as specifically identifying themes related to the research questions. First, I identified themes relating to norm creation and divided them into frontstage and backstage spaces. Also, I identified themes concerning norms and behaviours relating to gender and sexuality, again separating them between front and backstage spaces. Once I had done this, I looked for commonalities within the themes such as associated topics, accounts or experiences. I then re-read the data looking for contrasting accounts and experiences within the topics.

## 4 BACKGROUND ON CAMP DELAWARE

### 4.1 Age Groups and Housing

There are ten age groups for boys and girls at Camp Delaware. Each age group has their own set of bunks or house. The age groups are divided into three campuses for each gender: Lower, Middle and Upper Camp. The younger campers in lower and middle camp who are aged 7- 12 live in bunks and have three to four bunks per age group which are reflective of school grades. The boys aged 13-17 live in one big house with four wings; these wings are filled with a different age groups according to grade. In the center of the four wings is a living area with a few couches, lots of seating and a raised platform in the center (often used for wrestling). The *boys teen house* is at the bottom of the property tucked away in the woods. Therefore, it lends itself to privacy needed for the culture it fosters. On the other hand, the *girls teen houses* are at the top of the property, as far away from the boys teen house as possible. There are four distinct houses each with two to four wings and a central living space with seating. They are out in the open and right by the dining hall and athletic fields.

Though all the summers are undoubtedly important to campers, campers regard their ‘uppers summer’ which is their last summer as a full camper as the most importance. Uppers summer comes with a lot of status as the oldest campers, and a lot of benefits and privileges that the campers have been anticipating for years. In addition, many of the youngest campers look up to the uppers, so for many it is an honour to be looked up to as they looked up to uppers when they were younger. However, there are also CITs or counselors in training. In many ways, CITs are regular campers; they go to activities and have counselors who supervise them. However, in this role they are learning to be counselors so they are assigned to a younger group of kids or to help

at an activity area for half the day. Over the years at camp, the amount of responsibilities given to CITs has lowered, and they have become more like campers.

The canteen is a snack house primarily used by the teenagers. The younger campers get growing privileges as they grow through camp, with the youngest only visiting twice a summer to the oldest middle campers going every other night. All the younger campers go before 9pm. Canteen is one of the only times in camp when boys and girls have free space to interact as all other activities are gender segregated. The teens go to canteen from 9pm till 11pm every night. There they will often 'hook-up' and go 'up the hill' which literally means couples go up the hill the canteen is set on, into the darkness away from counselor supervision. Counselors are told to give them five minutes and then to go and disturb them.

## **4.2 Events**

*Breakout events* are themed games that occur, usually as a surprise to campers, that deviate from regular scheduling. There are two types of breakout events, campus events and whole-camp events. *Campus events* are unique events for set age groups. For the younger campers, these could be as short as half a day and up to two days for the older campers. Some themes include Pirates Day (all pirate themed activities), to College Day (each team represents a college) and Sausage Fest (an event I will detail later that is reserved for the teenage boys). These events require the participants to compete in sports, games, artwork, dances, singing and often costume. There are two *whole-camp events* during the summer: Olympics and Colour War. Olympics is a two-day event where the whole camp is split into four countries, within each age group the four countries compete for points playing sports. At the end of the two days, team captains from each age group compete in a task oriented relay race which starts with the youngest kids and ends with the oldest boys throwing a basketball shot without a backboard from half court. This event

is watched by the whole camp. Being an Olympics captain in your upper summers is a big camp honour. The second event is at the end of the camp and lasts five days. The entire camp is split into two teams, the colours of the camp. In Colour War, there are four days of sporting events, similar to Olympics followed by a whole camp task orientated Relay Race and a Sing competition. There are two relay races, one for the boys and one for the girls, the boys are done second and have some harder tasks. The race is finished with the girls throwing a softball from half court and the boys from full court, through a tire with only one bounce. Like Olympics, the whole camp is watching. Sing is an evening event that takes place in the big hall; it is decorated with themed scenery, and the campers are wearing costumes. The campers sing re-written lyrics to a well-known song and are scored by judges. The winner of Colour War is shown to the campers the next day with a semi-staged wrestling match between the counselor captains. The winner is whichever boy captain pins the other at the end of the match.

## 5 ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Camp versus Home

All the participants, even those who looked back on their camp experience less favourably, talked about how camp was a fantasy world. In their description, they addressed its lack of connection with the outside world. For some, camp showed them that camp and the ‘real world’ are both socially constructed. Thus, if social norms and expectations could change at camp, so could they in the real world. The things that existed in the camp world that they valued could also exist outside. In addition, when addressing their worst memory at camp, several participants referred to times when they were allowed access to the outside world either as older campers or as counselors. The removed nature of camp taught respondents to value this opportunity to be in an isolated environment. Though they may not have always fully understood it or been able to articulate it at the time, looking back they see the importance of the camp experience. Goffman (1968) illustrated how total institutions often reshape a person's understanding of the outside world. I argue that the awareness of the differences of camp is significant to the attendees understanding of society and the social rules within it. The safety of being cut off from society means that social rules are more malleable. Through interaction with peers inside the total institution, new meanings are created that differ from the outside society. With the interviews I conducted, I found four key ways in which former campers experienced summer camp as different from home: *The presentation of self at camp* can be changed or modified from the outside world. Former campers often used camp as a place to be a different version of themselves. The *perceived freedom* of camp means that many campers feel they are less constricted than at home. Former campers also see camp as a place to *learn lessons*, whether they be about themselves, social rules, or interaction with others. Finally, camp is a place to find

*friendships*, often outside their usual social group. All of the aforementioned is juxtaposed as different from home life.

### ***5.1.1 The Presentation of Self***

Campers saw their presentation of self as different from their presentation of self at home. All of the boys I interviewed talked about camp as way to harnesses their self-presentation. For many in this group, camp was a place where they could recreate themselves and leave behind parts of their identity or perceived identity they did not like. This is illustrated by the following quote.

Jack: “Camp was an opportunity to take on a different persona almost... because camp is a smaller group the longer you go there you are more likely to be the big dog on campus... compared to home where this wouldn’t necessarily be.”

As Jack explains he was able to be a big fish in a small pond and claim a more dominant roles in the camp environment. Part of the reason he was able to do this was the ability to be different from at home and part of this was because camp is a smaller setting than home. For others, camp was a place they could be their ‘true-selves’. Camp was free from stereotypes, judgements or social consequences that exist in the ‘real world’.

Abraham: “There’s just something about living with people when you're young when you're growing up with your best friends. Seven weeks when you are young is a really significant time for development, being able to spend that time without people who think they know how to develop you is important, you're not being forced or imprinted.”

Jacob: “I was always more confident at camp, I felt more comfortable talking to the girls... I think being removed from reality is an aspect of it, it's not real life, you can be your real self.”

Aaron: “At camp, I was able to be my true self. I never felt restricted or restrained at camp I was able to be myself and be natural.”

Samuel: “You could be your goofy self... there's no rules how society works there, so it lets you be who you want to be, if you don’t want this part from home there, then you don’t have to let it be.”

Though the experiences of the boys varied, in that some wanted to create or enhance desired identities whereas others wanted to leave part of themselves behind, they all had in common that camp was the place where they felt they had the ability to change their presentation of self. The removed nature of camp meant that people were free to develop identities in a place where they feel less judged or restricted. Some of the boys attributed the change in behaviour or self-presentation to the lack of parental figures at camp.

Benjamin: “You are much more willing to express who you are. There are no parents. You are just with your friends. There's no judgment.”

In addition to the lack of parents, the high concentration of young men (due to the segregation of genders) affected how some campers presented themselves at camp.

Abraham: “There are so many things I would not have said at home that I said in the teen house... I mean nothing terrible I don't wanna seem like I'm painting it in a bad light, but when you have fifty teenage boys and counselors, it's like that age where you are interested in sex, you wanna know what your counselors are doing... but I think that's part of the fun.”

Camp was such a different environment for many campers that in some ways they could be different people. For most of the men I interviewed this was a positive change. Though some did look back at some of the behavior they engaged in, notably in the teen house (as will be addressed later), many found camp was a place where they could grow, become more confident, and be the version of themselves better than they were at home.

The presentation of self for girls was more linked to behaviour than identity. The girls talked about camp as a place they could be more rebellious, confident and come out of their shell. For all, camp was a place to be silly, pull pranks and test the boundaries. Examples of this were often linked to peeing in unusual places. They likened the rebellious freedom they had at camp, to home life when the bedroom door was closed or being home when their parents were out.

Though not mentioned by all some respondents talked about camp as a place to find their confidence and uncover leadership skills.

Kayla: “I had a completely different group of friends. My friends at camp were much crazier and more rebellious than my ones from home and it encouraged me to get out of my shell. Camp was also very stress-free. I never had to worry about school things there.”

Sally: “You’re more independent at camp. At home, you have your parents to look out for you, whereas at camp you can make your own decisions.”

The above extracts from Kayla and Sally’s interviews have many similar elements to what the boys said, however their reasons for being different at camp were less about changing who they were and more about leaving behind stress from home and becoming independent. For the girls, the big difference between camp and home was the perceived freedom it brought.

### ***5.1.2 Perceived Freedom***

Rather than talking about camp as a place to change or recreate themselves, the girl ex-campers focused on camp as an escape. Whether it was an escape from being a model student and/or pressure from school or a difficult relationship with family, camp was a way to be cut off from their reality. Interestingly, for many camp is not a place they can freely leave. Despite the rules and restrictions of camp the girls still felt less restricted than at home. The camp schedule is regimented, with a seven-day week looking the same. The only part of the day that is not structured is free play, which is still supervised and built into the daily schedule. Camp is structured with rules and 24-hour supervision, in many cases more than they would have at home. Featured in few stories were counselors, despite the fact they were present for most if not all of their camper experiences. I posit that the invisibility of counselors in campers’ narrative is due to the counselors changing from year to year (while the kids remain the same). Moreover, counselors are often closer in age to campers than their parents, thus they blend into many of the

stories. Nonetheless, the counselors were there, supervising them and enforcing rules; therefore, it is interesting that many girl campers saw camp as a break from rules.

Sally: “For me, camp was an escape, it was like to get away from the stress I got from my family at home.”

Natalie: “At home, my life was completely full... camp was a break from school.”

All participants also referred to camp having a sense of freedom in some way or another. The girls saw it as a fundamental difference from home whereas freedom came up for boys in other areas of the interview, often when talking about presentation of self as shown above. For many, the sense of freedom they found was related to the removal of the influence of their parents. Many of the women participants felt that even though camp was structured it was not as oppressive or high pressure as the school environment. Many saw counselors as people to look up to, people who were closer to their age and thus experience, and/or people who could understand them better. In addition, many saw camp as less structured and supervised than home. Though this may not be true: the camp world clearly had a way of creating the illusion of reduced supervision or structure.

### ***5.1.1 Learning Lessons***

For many, camp was a place of development, a place to learn lessons and to grow; this is unsurprising since an average of eight summers of my participants' childhood were spent there. They talked about lessons primarily in terms of learning social skills, particularly concerning spending time with people outside their usual friend group. In addition, they talked about camp as a place where they were able to make mistakes, both social and personal ones. This was because of the reduced perceived social consequences (and sometimes parental consequences) that the removed camp environment creates. Moreover, some respondents also referred to the bond between camp mates that allowed for the learning of lessons and the ability to learn through

error. The bond created between campers from the shared experience and the remote locale of camp made them feel freer to make mistakes without negative repercussions. The lessons learned by girls were about taking opportunities, appreciating their time and as camper and making time count. Many participants saw lessons as perhaps the most important thing they got out of camp.

Sally: “Camp was an opportunity to grow.”

Abraham: “You’re figuring out things yourself, so there are a lot of mistakes that happen, I remember at camp there were a lot of mistakes I made.”

Sally and Abraham both saw camp as a place for improvement where they could learn things from their peers. At camp they could become improved versions of themselves or gain a better understanding of social rules and interaction. Camp was a safe space to learn, grow and inevitably make mistakes.

Kayla: “At camp, we try to pack in as many fun activities and adventures as possible because we’re only together for such a short period of time. Don’t count the days, make the days count. I definitely don’t think like that at home.”

Kayla also found that she appreciated being at camp and camp taught her to appreciate things more in the moment. All of these lessons are unique to the camp experience and their significance to the campers is understood through the total institution framework.

### **5.1.2 Friendships**

Perhaps due to the bonds made while in the secluded institution of summer camp, many talked about friendships made during their experience. Friendships were usually discussed in reference to what made camp so special.

Samuel: “Meeting everyone, creating that bond that will never ever be severed, being a part of that kind of family.”

Natalie: “You’re going back for the people.”

Abraham: “To this day I am closer to my friends from camp than my friends from home, and I think that really says a lot about the relationships you make.”

However, people's upper and CIT summers are when these friendships were truly cemented. The cementation of friendships was attributed to two things. Firstly, several participants talked about those who did not make it to 'upper summer'. They were said to have left as they caused too much drama or did not value camp life. They were often referred to as the bullies of the group. In very few cases did any of my participants still see those who left as a part of their group. Upper summer or in some cases CIT summer was often looked upon as the best summer. The status as well as the privileges associated with upper or CIT summers lead to many campers choosing to return. Many looked up to those having their upper or CIT summer as younger campers. However, many campers choose not to return to pursue other opportunities, such as traveling or internships. The last few summers were identified by all participants as the time the group 'really got close'. These become the people who are usually in the core group of friends who stay connected in their adult years. The friendships made in the last few summers cemented my participants' attachment to camp and truly made them feel they belonged somewhere. Enhanced bonding is common of total institutions as there is a small group of people who are experiencing similar things in a closed environment. However, I posit it is the culmination of being able to redefine yourself (in the case of the boys) and escape the pressures of home (in the case of the girls) combined with a place where it is safe to take social risks that increases the significance of friendships and the bond to summer camp. In addition, the status and belonging found at camp may not be found in other areas of life for some attendees; therefore camp is held as a sacred place during a time of significant development into adulthood.

## 5.2 Norms, Rituals and Behaviours

As a total institution, summer camp is filled with its own norms, rituals, and camp behaviours. There are certain things that campers come to learn and expect. For example, being welcomed off the busses on the first day of camp, or certain campus or whole-camp events happening. Becoming part of a summer camp means learning how to exist in this new environment. There are new definitions of the situation to learn (Cooley, 1992). Many new campers and counselors place a heavy reliance on returners to learn about this new social world. In short, their definition of the situation needs to be modified or completely rewritten (Goffman, 1978; Cooley, 1992). Irwin and Cressey (1962) assert that, in total institutions, new value systems are created that are situationally related. Therefore, certain high values are placed on events that, without context, hold no meaning. The routines and rituals lead to the expectation of certain things at certain times. If Colour War were not to break at the end of the summer, hundreds of campers would be disappointed. Camp norms affect interactions on the micro level. There are four areas which I will focus on; *norms, rituals and behaviours: status at camp, what makes camp so special and memories.*

### 5.2.1 Status at Camp

Status is important to all of my participants in the context of camp life. When addressing camp more broadly or explaining why they returned to camp, participants place importance on gaining status at camp. Status came in many forms; from being Colour War or Olympics captain, winning a big tournament for the camp, becoming a counselor or group leader or simply being one of the oldest kids in camp. They wanted to be someone the younger campers looked up to (as many of them did as children). So why was gaining status so important?

Jacob: "When you're in the house the older you are, the more authority you have."

For some it was the expectation of status, they had seen older kids gain it so now as they became the older kids they wanted it to. As Jacob stated, the status gained as an older teen boy meant more authority. Goffman (1978) argues that a key feature of total institutions is the privilege system. The obtaining of privilege through a privilege system means conformity to the institution is rewarded. Therefore, in the context of summer camp, people gain status positions (Colour War captain, counselor), by successfully negotiating this summer camp process. Of course, status did not only come from age. Within age groups status was created through conforming to dominant masculinities and femininities. I will go on to address this further in the *hegemonic masculinity at camp* section.

However, I argue that the desire for status is more complex than a reward through the privilege system. The desire for status requires buying into the culture, norms, and rituals of the summer camp system. Without the adoption of the camp culture, norms and rituals, status would have no value.

Amy: “I always wanted to be the uppers, to win Sing, you wanted to be older and have the label of CIT.”

All of the things Amy listed are meaningless outside of the camp world, yet by adopting the camp culture, these things become vitally important to the camp experience.

The reasons for the desire for status have been debated widely in the social sciences. Anderson, et al. (2015) highlights four elements of status; power, dominance, social belonging and SES status. The data indicate that social belonging may be a primary link to the desire for status in summer camp culture. Status in summer camp culture often means acceptance and successful navigation of group integration. However, Anderson et al. (2015) demonstrate that there is not a significant link between the desire for status and “belonging.” Alternatively, they assert that

culture plays a major role in the desire for status. If a culture's norms entrench a desire for status, those who subscribe to or are immersed in a culture will develop a desire for status within it. Therefore, as with Goffman's (1978) privilege system for total institutions, status becomes a reward for adhering to the rules of the culture.

Aaron: "I always wanted to be a counselor from when I was little I never even considered not going back."

As Aaron illustrates the desire for status and the rewards new status levels bring become ingrained into the camp culture. Moving through the system is, for many, done without question. The invisibility of the effect of structure shaping so many experiences demonstrates how powerful of an affect any institution can have.

### ***5.2.2 Why is camp so special? - Somewhere to belong***

When answering the question why was camp so special, it became clear that camp was about belonging. Camp is undoubtedly a place where social bonds form. For many parents, this is one of the great benefits of sending their child to summer camp. However, the significance of these social bonds was what made camp such a treasured experience for all of my participants.

Samuel: "The community and family is almost irreplaceable."

Benjamin: "Meeting everyone, creating that bond that will never ever be severed, being a part of that kind of family."

Aaron: "Those kids in the bunk are still my best friends today."

People as social creatures experience the desire to belong across all cultures (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The desire for belonging shapes our interactions, cognition, emotional and what we place value on (Baumeister, 2011). So, what is it about summer camp that fulfills that desire? The setting of Camp Delaware is a long-term sleepaway camp. It provides seven weeks of consistency from a young age, through teenage years and for many, into early adulthood. In

many ways, it is a fixed site of community, acceptance and friendship. It has existed since the early 1930's, and so there is a legacy to its existence. In addition, the rituals and, as I addressed earlier, status provide young persons with a stable site of consistency, belonging and often self-affirmation.

Sally: "No-one understands the goings on unless you went."

Natalie: "Camp is a place that are with your friends, the kids that make it are the ones that develop bonds, they last for a lifetime."

Jack: "I can't imagine my life without it."

### 5.2.3 *Best and worst memories*

I asked former campers about their best or worst memories in order to get them to reflect back on their time at camp. However, the data demonstrate how integration into camp and the adoption of values is integral to the camp experience. People's best memories, though different, all were related to important rituals or events at camp. It appears that the adherence or acceptance of rituals makes good camp memories. In contrast, the bad memories typically emerged from the deviation from camp norms or rituals. The creation of the bad memories being something that did not fit into camp values shows the importance of belonging as well as adapting camp culture in order to fit it. Whether it was leaving camp, not yet being attached to camp or the removed nature of camp life being broken, these were atypical of the camp culture, values or experiences<sup>3</sup>.

#### Best Memories

"Writing a Sing song."

"Captain for Olympics - making that shot, I still don't know how I did that, I mean it's impossible. But when you do make the shot even if it's not first, that feeling of being rushed at by everybody and it's captured on video. I will never forget that."

"Sausage Fest, overall."

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms were not listed next to memories as to protect the identities of the participants.

“Made the Jacobs cup team [basketball] youngest kid on the team we were in the finals.”

“My greatest memory was being Olympics captain as it was something I really wanted to do when I was little, and I looked up to the older kids. It was a surreal experience to stand in front of your team and lead them.”

All the memories shown above are about participation in camp rituals. The best moments the ex-campers could remember all demonstrate their connection and belonging to camp. Though the memories are different they show how much they value and have adopted the camp culture and that has affected their camp experience.

#### Worst memories

“Getting kicked out... I will never forget being screamed out and my mom picking me up.”

“First day ever, because I didn’t know anyone.”

“Going through the gates my last summer and realising I went back alone.”

“When I was little at camp I had anger issues, I have a couple of memories of getting into fights with kids or arguments with counselors, it was all my own doing.”

“My CIT summer we were all allowed to use our phones, I felt disconnected from my friends we didn’t feel as close that summer.”

Not only did the way in which their best and worst memories were constructed show a desire for belonging, but it also demonstrated how camp functions as a total institution. All of the bad memories shown above signal a lack of understanding of camp norms or having yet to be acculturated into the culture of summer camp. Whereas the good memories are heightened integration or reward for adhering to camp norms and values. It seems that the more camp culture is adopted the better the experience you have.

By adopting camp norms and rituals, campers are able to fully integrate into the summer camp world, they then are able to progress through the camp system gaining the privileges and rewards

that camp provides. Those that do not adopt these values struggle at camp and do not gain the attachment and sense of belonging as their peers. Over time the attachment and dedication to camp becomes unquestioned and summer camp becomes an important site for affirmation and belonging. However, when it comes to gender and sexuality the differences between life at camp and life at home become more complex.

### **5.3 Hegemonic Masculinity at Camp**

Being a co-ed yet mostly segregated-by-gender camp, means that gender functions are central to understanding this summer camp. Although, some gender norms could be renegotiated, the gender inequality prevailed. For example, many campers did not notice gender inequality at camp, because they fit in with normative notions of gender. However, anyone who was gender nonconforming was consciously impacted by these inequalities. My definition of gender nonconformity ranges from being a tomboy or liking 'feminine' or 'gay' activities to distancing themselves from hegemonic gendered practices at camp.

#### ***5.3.1 Activities are Fair as Long as You Fit In***

While many respondents reflected upon the difference in gendered activities, only those who were gender nonconforming in some way noticed the inequalities in how boys and girls were treated at the time. Among the boys, if someone wanted to do a nonconforming guy's activity like drama or dance then they would do one of two things. They would either choose not to do it for fear of being ridiculed or do it and have their sexuality questioned.

Jack: "I was not comfortable to do theatre at camp, in my group [boys doing theatre] it was always looked upon as weird."

Aaron: "I would ask to go to dance and drama. I went alone. I didn't go with a group, which if the camp director found out about someone would have probably been fired. My group was rough: as they got older they found out what the word gay meant and, going to there [to dance and drama] kept me away from that, and not that I couldn't take it, but I didn't need it, and I wanted to go to. I remember coming back a few times, and they were

like how was dance, were there any girls there? Stuff like that, that was annoying. I think I grew a lot in camp from that, because I don't think I'm gay, I'm not gay, at the time I didn't think I was gay, and that really hurt to hear something over and over again that wasn't true, that really sucked."

Camp was a struggle for campers who were gender nonconforming. For Aaron, who chose to reject camp assumptions about what activities boys would want to take part in; thus had to deal with not only their masculinity being questioned, but also their sexuality. As Pascoe (2005) notes, masculinity and sexuality are often intrinsically linked. Therefore, defying gender roles often also leads to the questioning of sexuality. Some campers such as Jack chose to forgo activities that would lead to his gender or sexuality being called into question. Those who did not go along with gender norms overtly or covertly inevitably suffered one way or another.

However, most of my participants did not notice gender inequality at camp as they fit in with normative notions of gender. The fact that so many campers did not even question that activities were gendered shows the privileged nature of being someone who conforms to gender norms. The participants also noted how the boys were given what appeared to be more privileges than the girls such as being allowed outside their bunks, being less supervised or treated as older. In addition, the girls noted that the boys were also encouraged to be more physical in both structured activities and in the bunk.

### ***5.3.2 We Win! The Boys Told Me So***

Big events were also a site where gender difference existed; however, only those who fit outside gender norms noticed it as a camper.

Benjamin: "Honestly we never thought about it [the difference in the boys being the focus of camp-wide events]."

However, almost everyone noticed it once they were a counselor or looked back on it as an adult. Many called attention to the two big breakout events as the spotlight moments focused on the

boys, not the girls. The male-centric nature of these events is best illustrated in two key places. First, in the relay tournaments, the winning shot is either solely taken by the boys or is finished by the boys. Second, at the end of Colour War, the winner of the five-day event is announced through a semi-staged wrestling match between the counselor leaders of the event. Though both the boy and girl (counselor) leaders for each team take part, the result is shown by the pinning of the boy leader. Both of these instances demonstrate that the structure of camp has distinct, implicit ways of displaying and reproducing a gender hierarchy.

Samuel: "Especially with the captains, it's the guy captains who are taking the shot... it's not necessarily added pressure, everyone who was going to be a captain knew about the expectations, I can't speak for everyone, but I looked forward to it."

Abraham: "The one thing I was thinking was the wrestling match, it's the two male generals [leaders of the teams] who finish it off."

To be a captain both brings status and requires status to be selected. The young children are not going to listen to you if you do not have some status to begin with. In addition, the requirements of captain means being good at sports, showmanship and conforming to dominant notions of gender. Therefore the captain positions themselves reaffirm gender norms in front stage spaces at camp. In contrast for girls status is about interests and the development of sexuality. As Sally discusses:

Sally "Within my division we had three groups. There was the girls who were boy crazy, the girls who were readers and the girls kind of in the middle."

Though Sally does not state it explicitly there is a hierarchy of status here. By the fact that she state there is a middle group is signifies that there was a group in between. When I asked if the boy crazy girls were the popular group, Sally said not exactly in their age group but they were with the girls in the younger divisions. These small but significant ways gender inequality is reinforced has an impact on all the young person's attending summer camps. Gender inequality

existing in this way normalised gender roles and inequalities. Moreover, who gets chosen to be captains often is related to status and hegemonic masculinity.

### 5.3.3 *The Boys Teen House*

The teen house, where the boys aged 14 to 17 lived, emerged as a micro-culture of its own. Even within the camp, it existed with its own set of rules, rituals and meanings attached to it. In many ways, the teen house became a kind of backstage. Many described it as like a frat house. It is a place where homosociality is the norm, where ‘boys will be boys’, and secret or covert hazing occurs. Now, this is not to paint a picture of a place infested with hegemonic masculinity and homophobic language (though this certainly did exist). The teen house also was a place where close bonds and memories that residents felt would always be treasured were made. Jacob illustrated that the teen house was more than a place where the importance of camp is inherent.

Jacob: “The physical thing is not really what the teen house is, it’s an emotional, mental place, that’s where you realise you have to milk your time left at camp.”

It was a place of freedom where rules were often broken, and boundaries could be pushed. It was a place where one participant had their first same-sex experience, even if they did not know it at the time. Jack, a former camper who now identifies as queer, reflects on the unique culture of the teen house:

Jack: “There were a couple summers - everyone had this weird mentality. We were away from the girls if things happen that in any other situation, like at home in my friend group this would never happen, but like at camp they’re just fucking around, it’s camp. There was a lot of dry humping it was a joke, but not, that’s why camp fucks with me.... What - camp was that like - the first time I had experiences with guys, but it wasn’t.... There was this one kid, we would like sleep together and cuddle, and that was not necessarily abnormal, but there were so many instances of affection being shown in very physical ways that would have never happened at home, and I don’t think even meant anything to most of them. The hazing stuff there were times fights broke out. I would never get into any fights at home, but it was the type of place where that’s ok I guess. The weirdest thing to me to this day is the non-sexual but sexual things you would end up in.”

Homosocial interaction between men facilitates the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity norms (Bird, 1996). Engagement with homosociality ensures the preservation of the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Homosociality requires an emotional detachment from ‘others’ that do not conform to the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity. Detachment is particularly central in total institutions as the removal from regular social relationships enables detachment to occur more easily. Therefore, in Camp Delaware, the teen house boys can detach from people who may not condone behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity (such as parents).

Benjamin: “There's this thing with the teen house where everything is on the DL. Everyone is trying to be this type of person.”

However, despite this, the teen house is a hotbed for the performance of hegemonic masculinity. One of the ways hegemonic masculinity is executed is through competition, either intergroup or individual. By employing competition, hierarchy and power are reaffirmed. Competition implicitly demonstrates what masculine qualities lead to power and success. Competition is an entrenched value at camp and often reaffirms boys as the dominant group (see we win the boys told me so). Abraham talks about competition in the teen house. There was an area of the teen house that was turned into a makeshift wrestling ring called the octagon.

Abraham: “We would have octagon fights where we would wrestle with people.”

The fact that octagon fights were ritualised and part of teen house culture, demonstrated how entrenched hegemonic masculinity is in the teen house. The octagon fights were not the only example of physical exertion of hegemonic masculinity. As Benjamin addresses it was common place for random acts of violence.

Benjamin: “Someone would come in with a whiffle ball bat and everybody [the youngest kids] would have to be hit with the bat”

In the above quote Benjamin was talking about 'raids' which was a form of initiation the older kids exercised when the younger kids moved into the teen house. These raids would happen throughout the summer.

Vital to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity is the sexual objectification of women not only objectifies women and reduces to existing for male pleasure, but it also reaffirms men's hierarchical position over women.

Jacob "At night that's when the teen house becomes the teen house.... hanging out after canteen, talking about what you'd done with the girls."

Jack: "There's this hyper masculine environment of like who are you going to hook up with next."

The teen house promoted the environment of hooking up and having a summer relationship. Back in the teen house after canteen the expectation was set that you should have tried to hook up as the main conversation is what you did with girls at canteen. In addition, by not being questioned by those with power (i.e. the older teens), the younger ones learn to follow the social scripts promoted by hegemonic masculinity. I argue it is also important to note that most of the boys who attend Camp Delaware are Jewish. The male Jewish identity is a traditionally marginalised masculinity (Lee, 2010; Hoberman, 1995). Studies have shown that those with a marginalised masculinity may fight harder to reclaim it in particular social contexts (Reichert & Ravitch, 2010; Stoudt, 2006; Stevenson, 2004; Brod; 1998). Connell (2005; 1995) argues that hegemonic masculinity is relational. Therefore, the hierarchy of masculinities is socially defined. In the real world, many of these boys would not necessarily be at the top of the masculinity food chain. However, at camp masculinity can be reclaimed and exerted, and this may be the only space where these boys achieve hegemonic masculinity.

Abraham: "I would describe it as sort of like a fraternity house. It's not for everybody, the older kids in the house assert their dominance...It's not for everybody, especially the kids who are not sporty or are quiet and reserved. It's not for them. It's very loud and very close you're with older kids, I look back on it very fondly."

As Abraham describes, the house requires a certain type of masculinity. In saying it's not for everybody, Abraham acknowledges the hierarchy of masculinities.

Almost all of the accounts about life in the teen house are absent of counselors. I think it is important to understand that counselors were present for most of the narratives and accounts about teen house life. However, the campers do not see them as instrumental to their experiences. Though there are some returning counselors each year, some dedicated returns who in particular help maintain the status quo of camp life, rules and rituals, many of the counselors are new to camp. The counselors' newness is significant as this means they are more likely to be complicit in certain camp rituals. As camp is a total institution those with no definition of the situation are likely to comply with the status quo rather than challenge it. In addition, those counselors who try to interrupt certain rituals are likely to be faced with a lot of resistance both from returning counselors and campers. Moreover, with regard to the teen house, it is often the male counselors who display the most dominant masculine traits who get placed there during staff week. The less masculine and sexually nonconforming men tend to be put with the younger boys. One participant notes that they remembered one when summer all the counselors on the youngest boys division were gay. I expect this was because the camp directors did not want openly gay counselors placed with the teen boys. Many of the participants talked about Camp Delaware not necessarily being the easiest place to be not-heterosexual. Therefore, structurally the culture of the teen house is maintained through the types of male counselors who are more likely to condone than condemn this culture.

In contrast, the girls' living area does not have a similar culture. Part of the reason for this may be because the girls live in four separate houses. The girls bonded in distinctly different ways than the boys. Most of their bonding was through staying up late and pulling pranks.

Natalie: "The older groups got away with more, some girls in my group peed in the bushes, and got into trouble."

Sally: "One week when we got back from a trip we moved the couch out of the older girls' house."

The culture that has formed in the individual girls' houses is focused on bonding activities.

Bonding activities often are arranged by the group leaders of each division. However, some of the girls also engaged in deviant bonding behaviors. Natalie and Sally both talked about pranks they had engaged in during their time on teen camp.

The spatial setup of the girls' teen house is firstly very different. As the girls' teen houses are separated by age group, there is less interaction between the ages. This means there is less policing of camp traditions and regulation of femininity between the older and younger girls. In addition, there is no social space for all the girls to congregate, which limits the ability for group traditions and rituals to be established. Though there is some rivalry and deviance, it is not comparable to what occurs in the boys' teen house. The space that the girls are given could be a big factor; however, it could also be that girls are not trying to reclaim their identities in the way the boys are. As I address in the presentation of self-section, the girls did not see camp as a way to reinvent themselves or an opportunity to be something. It was an escape from home, it was perceived freedom, and without the pressures of proving or even enacting a certain identity the cultures do not manifest.

### ***5.3.4 Sausage Fest - The Main Teen House Breakout Event***

Sausage Fest is a key example of homosociality in the teen house culture, and it is a ritualistic practice that is an annual event in the teen house. The breaking of Sausage Fest is met with the excitement and anticipation of the competitive games that are to follow. Most games in this event are filled with innuendo that appear to be sexual in nature. In many ways, Sausage Fest could be considered part of the teen house's hazing process. Mechling (2009) states that hazing or the humiliation of hazing can serve to create bonds and form a closeness of the group. Perhaps Sausage Fest is one of the ways in which the teen house culture becomes a place of closeness. As the teen house is so closed off, campers are able to break social norms / engage in these rituals.

Samuel: "It's almost like a fraternity day, you kinda like just haze, you do a bunch of crazy shit, you are doing so much inappropriate stuff and just laughing."

Hazing in many forms relies on the trust of the group and participants. This concept is similarly demonstrated in the male bonding that occurs in military training. Though there is often an implication of male-on-male sexual activity, the non-acting on it reaffirms the heterosexual identity. There is an implicit trust in engaging in these activities that no one will break the unspoken rules and boundaries of the act. Moreover, the jovial or satirical nature of these acts reaffirms heterosexuality by actively rejecting the chance of homosexual meaning being attached to this action. There is a fine line between the homoerotic and the homosexual homoerotic meaning must be dismissed to demonstrate adherence to heterosexual norms and pass the test of normative sexuality (Higate, 2012; Lee 2010). This explains why suspect homosexuals are often not welcomed or even acknowledged in these spaces as they pose a risk to the codes that exist within these rituals.

Jack: “There was totally a year [Sausage Fest] where a kid had a sausage in his ass crack, as a part of the event, you see that was the culture that for some reason was normal at camp... I doubt most of the kids would acknowledge it, it was such a thing.”

Abraham: “Don’t think about anything too much [in Sausage Fest].”

Benjamin: “Growing up I would never think of it like that [sexually], I would just embrace it, we would do Sausage Fest and it was more like a competition rather than (pause) like that[sexual].”

Jacob: “Sausage Fest was better as it was just the teen house it was like a secretive thing, there were lots of innuendos, it was our own thing, there was a lot of mystique to it.”

However, akin to military accounts, the dominant participants display their power within the group by participating in these acts without having their gender or sexual identity questioned. Participation in these events demonstrate why it is that male bonding is often threatened by the presence of non-heterosexuals (Cohn 1998: 137). While the opportunities for male-on-male sexual acts are possible, these acts, and by implication homosexuality, are actively rejected through the renegotiation of meaning. Skillfully, and with mutual consent fostered at the unspoken level, this heteronormative interaction is boundary making. For many who participate hazing can be pleasurable, and respecting certain boundaries in the delivery and bonding over the humiliation can create closeness between ‘willing’ participants (Mechling 2009: 52). Many of the ex-campers expressed the enjoyment they experienced when talking about Sausage Fest; they reflected on it as a fond memory, a time of brotherhood. Hazing indicates high levels of trust among the group rather than fear, anxiety and suffering by the plebes (Mechling 2009: 52). The development of events like Sausage Fest is likely derived from the blurred lines between sexual identity and what counts as sexual practices (Flood 2008: 340). The acts make light of homophobia and demonstrate how intact your heterosexuality is by how not gay you can be while executing these practices. As a living environment for around one-hundred teenage boys, the teen house is a hotbed for cultural interaction and understandings of norms at summer camp.

As identified in the analysis on presentation of self, many of the boys saw camp as a way to reinvent themselves. The reinvention appears to be a reclamation of masculinity.

In contrast, the girls' breakout events are less covert and are more 'tame'; the younger girls get involved in them, and they are less ingrained. They have Fashion show and College Day.

Fashion show includes dancing, designing themed costumes such as tv shows or decades and competing. College day though seems academically focused is a day of athletic competitions followed by a cheer contest which includes a comedy mascot section. None of these events are sexualised, but they are gender-segregated, so only girls attend. The younger girls get to take part as the audience in these events; this is not the same in Sausage Fest. The girls' events are less focused on achieving emphasised femininity, as it is not something they need to reclaim.

#### **5.4 Sexuality at Camp**

Summer camps are often the place where many U.S youth begin to learn about sex and sexuality (Van Slyck, 2006). Camp is often the sight for many firsts for campers from the first time they ask someone to prom to the first time they have sex. In addition, the routines and rituals of camp (being mostly gender segregated for activities) place high precedence of heterosexual couples. In this section, I highlight the ways in which camp becomes an environment for many camper's firsts, and the experiences of non-heterosexual campers.

##### ***5.4.1 There's a First Time for Everything***

There was a distinct pattern of 'firsts' for both boys and girls at summer camp. Whether it was their first time asking someone out, kissing or having sex participants often experienced 'first' during their time at camp. If participants did not have a particular first they noted that many of their friends did. Many of the boys attributed their first to being more confident or being a different person at camp. They found freedom in being away from real life.

Aaron: “Everyone at camp is open to their first. I think the girls think that way too. It’s camp, this is where, I met the first girl I fell in love with at camp...Camp changed my life in terms of girls.”

Many of the girls simply explained it as ‘it’s camp’. ‘It’s camp’ has some interesting connotations. I interpret this saying as a way of explaining that it is not real life, and acknowledging norms are different here. For girls, camp seemed a space that had fewer consequences than home. They felt less constrained by rules and expectations at camp. In contrast, the boys saw it as a way to be more confident or enhance certain parts of themselves.

#### **5.4.2 *Out at Camp***

Two key elements emerged from the data when people spoke about being out at camp. I began by asking them what they thought it would be like to be out at camp. They felt that camp is not an easy space to come out in.

Abraham: “It wasn’t like terrible, camp just... is maybe not the safest place to be out.”

Sally: “Camp isn’t for everyone. My sister went to a different camp, I imagine camp is not conducive to that sort of thing.”

Secondly, they talked about the impact of the non-heterosexual visibility of counselors’ sexuality had an impact on their realisation and acceptance of their queer identity.

Jack: “The relations between guys and girls, it was very heteronormative.”

Aaron: “It was almost this prescribed thing everyone had a boy or girl for the summer, and it was this weird thing where you almost had to have that.”

Kayla “You sit outside canteen, and there is a group of guys and a group of girls, and that structure promotes it.”

Benjamin: “So much of who you are is how athletic or masculine you are perceived to be [when referring to why people are not out at camp].”

To almost everyone’s recollection no-one ever was out at camp, except there were people who identified as out at camp. Seven out of ten participants could not recall anyone ever being out as

a camper. They spoke about knowing people who came out after camp, but no one ever at camp. However, some of my participants identified as queer, and some were out at camp. Now how out they were is the key here. They expressed only being out to the people in their group and some counselors. Therefore, as I had little crossover between age groups, it might be that I did not interview anyone to whom someone's queer identity was disclosed. Many participants, including those who came out post camp, talked about how camp was not necessarily the safest or best place to come out. The girls explained that camp was very heteronormative and intimate in shared spaces so girls might not feel comfortable breaking this norm. In addition, coming out at camp is a big risk, as there is nowhere to go if it goes badly. The boys, however, talked about the overtly masculine environment, the presence of gay slurs and homophobic language that the teen house culture creates. Some chalked this up to the teen house “not being for everyone.” Despite this, some participants had some of their first same-sex experiences in the teen house, and thought of them as such at the time. It is important to note that those who came out had a positive experience once they did.

Kayla: “I think when I started getting to know the counselors that's when I started thinking about sexuality... that was one of the first times I saw a gay relationship happen and it not matters.”

Throughout my interviews, most of the younger participants could name maybe three or four counselors they knew who were out during their time at camp. However, those who finished camp as a camper in 2013 or earlier had no recollection of out counselors. The visibility of out counselors did affect my out participants. Those who knew of out counselors came out during or shortly after camp. Research demonstrates that knowing other out persons or being in a space where there is visibility of queer persons makes the formation of a non-heterosexual identity

easier (Rhoads, 1997; Gray, 2009; Wuest 2014;). They talked about the impact even just knowing of out counselors had on their self-concept about sexuality.

## 6 DISCUSSION

Total institutions are a part of society; though the rules, norms and values can be renegotiated and the meanings can change; people are still coming from a world that has these social rules and expectations. Therefore, the outside culture has the potential to affect how the culture of the total institution form and the two cannot be completely separated. It would be interesting to see how camp culture would change if it remained isolated past the seven weeks. Therefore it is important to note how the norms, rules and rituals in summer camp culture are influenced by structural factors of the institution versus bottom-up culture creation by its members.

The rituals, norms and behaviours at camp are established through culture creation and symbolic interactions. Creating camp culture through norms and rituals is less about the individual acts but more about the bigger picture of creating a community that people could belong to. The longer people were at camp the more privileges and status they gained. Though this is not atypical of a total institution, the relational hierarchies were about more than simply status and power.

Gaining a status position showed to other campers and themselves that they were unquestionably a part of camp. Though these positions were meaningless outside of the camp setting, they gave children something to aspire to be and a place they felt they belonged. Social belonging is an important part of well-being and is particularly important during adolescence (Gardner et al., 2000). Therefore, summer camps can become an important aspect of a child's development.

Summer camps become a place of consistency, belonging and self-affirmation.

The self-affirmation piece was an unexpected finding of this study. Notably the boys saw camp as a way to present themselves differently than they do at home. For many this was bolstering some parts of themselves and leaving others at home. In contrast for the girls, the removed nature

of camp took away the pressures they felt at school or at home, they were more confident, relaxed and / or rebellious at camp. The girls did not necessarily change or filter their self-presentation but simply felt less restricted in the camp environment. Interestingly, the girls did not use camp to change their self-presentation but the boys did. Perhaps it is the gendered expectations from wider society that influenced their self-presentation. Girls are usually expected to be better behaved and perform well in school (Santor et al., 2000; Vantieghem & Van Houtte, 2015). There is immense pressure for them to do act a certain way. Camp is a place where they can escape from and subvert these pressures. On the other hand, the primary pressure young boys feel is adherence to hegemonic masculinity (Santor et al., 2000; Pascoe, 2003). If they are unable to successfully claim hegemonic masculinity at home, at camp (an environment where they can achieve belonging and is a smaller and more heterogeneous social group than perhaps at home) they can claim this identity more easily. The norms from outside society often affect how the norms inside camp form. However, the norms can also be altered or be reactionary. As camp is an independent culture new norms can form over time. Particularly in the backstage spaces of camp, campers are able to become their desired selves. However, with the frontstage spaces reflecting outside norms, this sets the tone for what is and is not acceptable. Perhaps the contrast between front and back stage spaces at camp is why the boys teen house has manifested in the way it has. The panopticon of wider camp and society means that campers think they have to conform to hegemonic masculinity. In addition, because this group comes from a place where their masculinity is often marginalised, camp becomes a space where they feel they can claim dominance. It is an interesting contrast that although the girls saw it as a place to be 'freer' that freedom only allowed them freedom from certain gender expectations (such as strict scheduling and school pressure) camp. Despite the freedom they felt they still experienced being subjected

to displays of gender hierarchy. I argue that the gender inequality witnessed at camp did not impact the freedom they felt for two reasons. Firstly, they are exposed to gender hierarchies in regular society so it is not distinguishably different. Secondly, the effects of gender hierarchy are not experienced overtly; rather, they are internalised (Mahalingam, 2003; Butler 1990). It is important that these simple gender differences in traditional summer camp activities be addressed.

With hegemonic masculinity comes compulsory heterosexuality. Maybe in part due to the gender segregated nature of camp and in part due to how normative and assumed heterosexuality still in U.S society, compulsory heterosexuality was overwhelmingly present at Camp Delaware. Heterosexuality is built into the rituals from the couples walk to teen house evenings. However, what my findings did show was that not all could be suppressed. Where there was visibility, it was drastically important to those who were Queer campers. Many found that camp was a safer place to experience sexual firsts (than home) and some even had their first relationships there. I argue this is why it is vital that we begin to de-stigmatise Queer sexualities for young people. Many of my participants did not have any personal issue with non-heterosexuality yet assumed camp might not be a comfortable place to be out.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

Camp is a unique culture full of rituals, expectations, and meanings and thus, it becomes a cherished place for many young U.S children. Gender and sexuality norms are reproduced at camp that reflected aspects of regular society. However, by being a total institution other experiences also occur that do not have exist in my participants 'real life'. Central to this thesis is the understanding of why camp was such a different space, which allowed for the reimagining of selves or simply an escape from real life. The findings show that gender and sexuality norms are complex and deeply learned. Yet, norms have the capacity to be reshaped in certain conditions and spaces. The focus on hegemonic masculinity, particularly in backstage spaces such as the teen house could explain why the boys see camp as a way to reinvent or be their true selves. Camp appears to be a space where these boys with a traditionally marginalised masculinity can reclaim it and reproduce desired hegemonic masculinity.

Goffman's (1978), analysis of front and backstage selves states that the frontstage space is the social self. It requires a polished performance with adherences to expectations, norms, definitions of the situations and dominant ideologies. Hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality permeate total institutions. However, where the meanings change often occurs in back stage spaces of summer camp, therefore, there are contradictory understandings of gender and sexuality in these unique spaces. It is important to understand how and why these occurrences can happen as they demonstrate the power of the hegemonic discourses surrounding sexuality and gender performances. They also simultaneously dismantle the fixed nature of these identity expressions and the meanings we take from their display.

Hegemonic gender and sexuality are so deep-seated that they permeate smaller cultures and due to the panopticon effect (from outside society) gender and sexuality are regulated and controlled.

Yet when the campers are away from the panopticon in the back stage spaces, is where the most norms and values can be renegotiated (Foucault, 1977; Goffman, 1978). Gender and sexuality, norms and values are renegotiated in other ways; this is shown in through the changes in behaviour and perspectives of campers at camp compared to home. As demonstrated by the contrast of norms in front and back stage areas, the panopticon effect means that gender and sexuality are regulated in ways that contradict each other in front and back stage settings at summer camp.

In summer camp, within frontstage spaces hegemonic gender and sexuality norms are regulated. In terms of gender, one way norms are regulated is through the reinforcement of boys' events taking priority. While both boys and girls participate in events, boys are the focus and hold center stage in the winning of this events. Camp reflects the outside world's norms of gender hierarchy in sports. The gender hierarchy at camp is evidence of the panopticon effect, as there is no precedent for either boys or girls' events to be valued this way; however, in recent years these 'traditions' have been created which reflect outside values. Similarly, reflection of norms also occurs within sexuality, specifically heteronormativity. There are no written rules in camp that state that counselors can only display a heterosexual sexuality. However, the panopticon effect of heteronormativity means that few counselors are open regarding queer sexualities. This serves as external reinforcement of the idea that queer relationships are in some way wrong or shouldn't be visible.

In this thesis, I aim to gain a greater understand about the ways in which total institutions become places where culture and cultural norms can be recreated. Due to the new environments and secluded locales, camp is a place where meaning can be recreated, and due to these shared

experiences, social bonds are made that often seem unbreakable. However, despite the ability for many norms to change, the pervasive sexuality and gender norms are still present and permeate camp culture. Despite all this, many children find belonging, friendship and learn lessons away from their parents and family. Many campers find that they can become a different if not better version of themselves. Camp is not for everyone and a lot of work must be done to make it a safer and more welcoming place for those who are not heterosexual and gender conforming. Nonetheless, where else in society can you dance, dress and act like nobody's watching with the reasoning simply being, 'it's camp'.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A Interview Guide

Tell me about your time at camp?

Tell me about your favourite activities or events that happen at camp?

How was camp different from home?

What were your best memories?

What were your worst memories?

Describe how your bunk changed over the years?

Was there anything notable about the difference between structured camp activities and experiences inside the bunks or houses?

What were the differences in camp as you got older?

- Prompt about how you saw camp
- Prompt about how you were treated
- Prompt about relationships with other campers

What do you think makes camp so special to some? Why some and not others?

Do you have any camp values that are different from home values?

Are there things you engaged in at camp with your campmates that you would never do at home?

What? Why?

Tell me about any camp relationships you had?

What sexual experiences (if any) did you have while at camp?

Did you ever engage in sexual activity with your same-sex campmates?

Tell me about some common activities at camp?

Were any of them different for boys and girls?

What did you learn about sex (that you later found out to be true / untrue) from camp?

What gender differences did you notice at camp?

What was your interpretation of \_ (camp activity that is gendered) \_\_\_

Do you remember anyone who struggled / had issues with some of the gendered norms at camp?

Did your view of camp change once you became a counselor? If yes how?

What affected your decision to go back as an adult?

What affected your decision to not go back?

### **Appendix B Demographics**

Pseudonym	Gender	Years at Camp
Aaron	Man	7
Jacob	Man	9
Jack	Man	9
Abraham	Man	10
Benjamin	Man	10
Samuel	Man	6
Natalie	Woman	8
Sally	Woman	9
Amy	Woman	9
Kyla	Woman	5