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# Perceptions of adults with Intellectual Disabilities on experiences at a weeklong camp

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**Perceptions of adults with Intellectual Disabilities on experiences at a weeklong camp**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the  
*School of Human Ecology*

By

*Erica Teilhaber*

Under the mentorship of *Dr. Brent Wolfe*

ABSTRACT

*This study was conducted to attempt to understand the perceptions of a weeklong camp experience for adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities. A survey was administered to campers from two of the three locations, asking questions pertaining to their time spent at camp. Specifically researchers asked questions related to the conceptual, social, and practical domains. Additionally, researchers sent a follow up survey to make sure the data they summarized was correct. Results showed positive feedback, and convey the participants perceived improvements in aspects related to the conceptual, social, and practical domains.*

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## Introduction

Historically, it has been common to combine individuals into groups judged on their ability to conform to societal norms. Additionally there can be a tendency to have narrow opinions toward ability and “normality.” To these points, rather than viewing a person holistically with unique strengths and attributes, individuals with disabilities and disabling conditions are often marginalized and excluded (Brittain, 2010). For those who have an Intellectual/Developmental Disability, recreation and leisure opportunities decline once they are no longer eligible for services through the school system. It is important to consider how to include all people because all individuals (regardless of ability or disability) have the right to participate in leisure activities (Stumbo & Peterson, 1998). Although individuals who have a disability encounter more barriers in recreation participation, they still have the same desires as any other person and are striving to feel included (Stumbo & Peterson, 1998). Unfortunately, there has been limited research exploring recreation and leisure opportunities for adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities; therefore, the proposed research project will address effects of a one-week, residential camp for adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities on three domains: conceptual, social, and practical (Shogren, Luckasson, & Schalock, 2014).

## Literature Review

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR (2005) consisted of five different axes used to categorize individuals with mental illnesses: Axis I (Clinical Disorders), Axis II (Personality Disorders), Axis III (General Medical Conditions), Axis IV (Psychosocial and Environmental Problems), and Axis V (Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF)). The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical

Manual was released in 2013; after a 14-year revision process, this publication successfully moved away from the multi-axial coding system. In doing so, the transformation enabled a more holistic view of individuals with mental disorders. This new approach is a more accurate representation of a unified approach that utilizes recent knowledge of diagnoses (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Of particular note for the current project is the restructuring of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual that has occurred. Labels that have been assigned to some disabilities have changed, particularly Intellectual Disability (Intellectual Developmental Disorder), which was previously named Mental Retardation. Prior to the DSM-V, Mental Retardation was an Axis II diagnosis, which meant that impairments directly correlated with the disorder had the potential to be treated separately from other diagnoses. With the DSM-V, all mental disorders are on one single axis with equal consideration (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). With this recent outlook, professionals as well as caregivers have advanced in their schemas and beliefs towards those with cognitive disabilities by perceiving individuals as unique persons with varying characteristics, rather than placing them in a group based solely on a classification system.

With the prior information as a backdrop, an Intellectual Disability is now defined as one who has “significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills” (Shogren, et al., 2014, p. 110). This definition serves to establish the level of ability in which an individual copes with everyday tasks in the *conceptual*, *social*, and *practical* domains.

The conceptual domain includes skills in language, reading, writing, math, reasoning, knowledge, and memory. The social domain refers to empathy, social judgment, interpersonal communication skills, the ability to make and retain

friendships, and similar capacities. The practical domain centers on self-management in areas such as personal care, job responsibilities, money management, recreation, and organizing school and work tasks (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 2).

The final component of the definition of an Intellectual Disability is the age of diagnosis. The developmental period, typically from birth to age 22, is when symptoms arise and individuals are diagnosed. Best detected at an earlier age, “recent estimates in the United States show that about one in six, or about 15%, of children aged 3 through 17 years have a one or more developmental disabilities” (Boyle, 2011). By replacing the term Mental Retardation with the term Intellectual Disability and the parenthetical term (Intellectual Developmental Disorder), the need for care in regards to cognitive capacity is reflected. While the current method of diagnosis runs across the three domains, the inclusion of IQ scores are still central to the diagnosis of an Intellectual Disability. The DSM-V calls for an IQ of about 70 or lower in order to be eligible for this particular diagnosis. This revision of the DSM-V is now accurately affiliated “with terminology used by the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Diseases, other professional disciplines and organizations, such as the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and the U.S. Department of Education” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 2). To reflect current terminology in the literature, the term Intellectual Disability (ID) will be used throughout this paper. Intellectual disabilities may include, but are not limited to, the following diagnoses: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Williams Syndrome (WS), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Cerebral Palsy (CP), Muscular Dystrophy (MD), and Down’s Syndrome.

*Conceptual Domain*

The conceptual domain examines skills in everyday life involving language, reading, writing, math, reasoning, knowledge, and memory (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 2). The following literature discusses how individuals with ID benefit in this area when provided the opportunity for recreation activities or experiences.

There have been several studies (Everhart, Newman, Rutecki, Steinbacher, & McLaughlin, 2014; Rommel & Anderson, 2013) examining effects of a variety of interventions on the conceptual functioning of individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. According to Everhart et al. (2014), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a disorder that has a wide range of limitations “affecting communication, language processing, and peer socialization” (p. 3). In relation to the cognitive aspect, academic learning is also hindered. The purpose of this study was to explore if structured, individualized physical activity positively correlated with improvement of mathematic skills completed in the classroom for individuals in grades K-12 with ASD. Results displayed an improvement in daily math skills compared to the beginning of the study. There was an increase in progress after physical activity interventions were implemented, and a decrease when they were revoked (Everhart et al., 2014).

There is a large assumption often placed on students that the desire to take a break during an academic lecture is due solely to the fact they are bored, and would rather socialize. Although at times this may be true, a recent study established direct benefits if breaks are used in a productive manner. Rommel and Anderson (2013) analyzed impacts that academic breaks have on students with ID concerning an increase of focus on provided instruction. This study was conducted with four males and three females in the



Perceptions of adults with Intellectual Disabilities on experiences at a weeklong camp 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades of high school. Participants were observed for on-task behavior before as well as after the intervention was implemented. A 20-minute yoga session was given, providing a mental and physical break from a 90-minute block of academic learning. Following participation in yoga class, behaviors improved as evidenced by fewer disruptions in class, and a greater enjoyment in the learning process.

After reviewing the presented literature, it is evident that recreation activities have the ability to improve individual's functioning in the conceptual domain. Specifically, it was noted that the use of physical activity was beneficial in improving communication skills and on task behaviors in school settings.

#### *Social Domain*

The social domain considers skills in regards to empathy, social judgment, interpersonal communication skills, the ability to make and retain friendships, and similar capacities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 2). The literature presented below explains how recreation participation influences individuals with ID in this domain.

In addition to examining effects of interventions on the conceptual skills of individuals with ID, several studies have also explored effects of interventions on the social domain. Parker (1998) examined the effects of integrating 11 adolescents with and without Intellectual Disabilities at Camp Ramah. Integrated activities (activities between "typical" campers and those in the program) were offered formally when the volunteers were encouraged to invite participants to engage in activities together and informally throughout the day as natural occurrences. At the end of the camp, a questionnaire was delivered to those who did not have a disability. A majority of the assessed campers had positive feedback; they stated that it improved their camp experience by having an

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increased knowledge concerning ID, and integration allowed more friendships to be created. Additionally, guardians of the campers with ID were sent a questionnaire a week following camp. This document addressed potential growth in social skills, self-help skills, and cognitive/academic skills. Results from the guardians were returned with optimistic comments in all three areas, specifically in “confidence, increased interactions with others, better habits at meal time, and increased calm” demeanors (Parker, 1998, p. 289). While this study suggests camp activities can have positive effects on individuals with ID, it did not seek input directly from those individuals.

According to Townley and Kloos (2009) it is clear that integration is a significant factor to respect, whether one possesses an impairment or not. It has been acknowledged that “the absence of a psychological sense of community [is] the single most disintegrating aspect of contemporary life, and [it is associated] with loneliness, alienation, psychological distress, and a feeling of impotence regarding social forces” (Townley & Kloos, 2009, p. 363). Having the knowledge to avoid the concept of separation has significant power to influence on an individual’s quality of life in several aspects. Through a five-week day camp known as Camp Shriver, Siperstein, Glick, Harada, Bardon, and Parker (2007) assessed the impacts of a program for individuals involved in the Special Olympics. The purpose of this study was to examine the camp’s impacts on “the sports skills of campers, the social relationships among campers with and without ID, and the attitudes and perceptions that camp staff hold towards individuals with ID” (Siperstein et al., 2007, para. 7). Results suggested that study participants reported feeling equally accepted, leading to a positive outcome in making new friends. There was also a finding, which stated, “children with and without ID can improve at

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similar rates in the same recreational sport program” (Siperstein et al., 2007, para. 17).

This work demonstrates it is imperative to consider interventions that will utilize concepts of inclusion to help increase functioning in the social domain.

After reviewing the prior literature, it can be noted that recreation participation for individuals with ID is beneficial for their progression in the social domain. These studies target the concept of integration between those with and without disabling conditions; the review demonstrated how this action increases social skills for all, as well as how individuals perceive each other.

#### *Practical Domain*

The practical domain focuses on self-management in areas such as personal care, job responsibilities, money management, recreation, and organizing school and work tasks (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 2). The examined literature below provides examples of how opportunities for recreation aid individuals with ID develop these areas.

While individuals without disabilities typically do not have to worry about recreation participation, an individual who has a disability typically must fight for the right to recreate. Fortunately, leisure education is rising to the surface for those who possess diagnoses such as Down’s Syndrome (Pueschel, 1996). There have been multiple studies to relay the idea that leisure and recreation have the potential to improve functioning in all areas of life, especially in areas such as autonomy and work tasks. Zhang, Weideman, Bogard, and Chiotti (2013) conducted a study to examine the implementation of a bi-weekly recreational physical activity program on young adults with a mild ID. The program showed to be effective as evidenced by improvement to

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perform overall task-analyzed steps during activities. Participants displayed independence through self-initiation during a task-analysis activity that was implemented (Bogard & Zhang 2011).

Independence holds a significant and heavy weight on a majority of any population. According to Pueschel (1996), the primary method for development of independence is if people “have access to opportunities and options that will permit them to live life as they desire to” (p. 94). A recent study piloted by Kim, Blair, and Lim (2014) examined how interventions might positively influence problem behaviors engaged in by high school students with severe ID. These authors were particularly interested in impacts of tablet assisted Social Stories (SS) on the participants’ target behaviors. With the use of a tablet, students were to read SS that were created on Prezi and accessed through Quick Response (QR) located in the teacher’s office. The motivation to have sufficient behavior and to learn was an outcome that was accessed simply through a sense of leadership with the recreational use of a tablet.

The prior literature explains that when individuals with ID are given the opportunity to hold leadership positions and follow directions, they will likely succeed. Furthermore, by utilizing recreation as a tool to prompt these characteristics of self-management, there is potential for other areas, such as behavior, to be improved. This is vital to a caregiver, teacher, or friend to comprehend, because gaining a sense of autonomy plays a large role in one’s quality of life (Bogard & Zhang 2011).

Multiple research articles support the idea that individuals with ID have the ability to improve their functioning in the conceptual, social, and practical domains of life if given the opportunity. Although interventions are known to be beneficial, there remains

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an obvious lack of opportunity for adults with ID to experience growth in these three domains. Much of the reviewed literature investigated primarily focused adolescents and did not put substantial effort into examining populations 21 and older. Additionally the voices of the participants are rarely reported; studies narrow in on observations and responses from other perspectives, such as caregivers or other participants, rather than the participants themselves. Lastly, majority of the past studies conducted are quantitative, rather than qualitative. Rather than focusing on pre-test and post-test data, a qualitative approach allows the voices of the participants to become the primary focus of the data.

### Research Questions/Hypotheses

The purpose of this research was to identify impacts of a one-week residential camp on the conceptual, social, and practical domains of individuals with ID. Surveys were sent to campers in December 2015 addressing their experiences at camp in March 2015 and October 2015. The research examined the data from multiple perspectives; however, at its core, the researchers attempted to understand participants' perspectives of the camp experience as they related to the conceptual, social, and practical domains. This research may help increase understanding of how camp experiences influence conceptual, social, and practical domains and aid in the growth process for the camp in terms of supplementary activities to provide. Specifically the researcher sought to address the following question: "How does a residential camp environment impact participants in the conceptual, social, and practical domains?" It was hypothesized that attending a residential camp for one week would increase individuals' perceptions of skills in each of the identified domains.

### Methods

*Sample and Participant Selection*

Camp Joy, where the research occurred, serves adults who have a variety of Intellectual Disabilities. Campers' diagnoses include but are not limited to: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Williams Syndrome (WS), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Cerebral Palsy (CP), Muscular Dystrophy (MD), and Down's Syndrome.

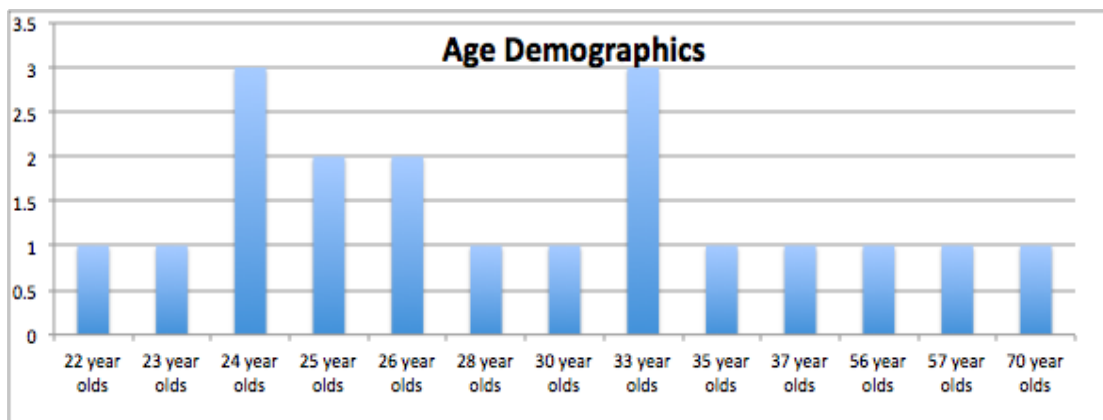
Camp Joy is a weeklong camp created to serve adults, ages 21 and older, who have been diagnosed with Intellectual Disabilities. In an attempt to reach as many adults as possible, Camp Joy has two locations in the Southeast and one location in the Midwest. In total, Camp Joy has facilitated 19 camp sessions at their three locations; while there are repeat campers each year, there are also many first time campers present during each session. It provides opportunities to grow in multiple capacities through the use of recreation. A typical day at camp consists of recreation participation to enhance camper functioning in the conceptual, social, and practical domains. Commonly, campers are split up into groups of about 14, including approximately an equal number of males and females. A typical day at camp chronologically includes: breakfast, two activities, lunch, cabin time, an additional two activities, dinner, an evening camp-wide event, cabin time, and finally bedtime.

All research participants that were recruited are campers who attended the two camps in the southeast during the 2015 calendar year. The survey was sent to two different locations in order to gain a wider variety of responses; through this route, comparisons between camp experiences were explained and recommendations for future camps were made. On average, Camp Joy hosts about 55 campers and roughly 60

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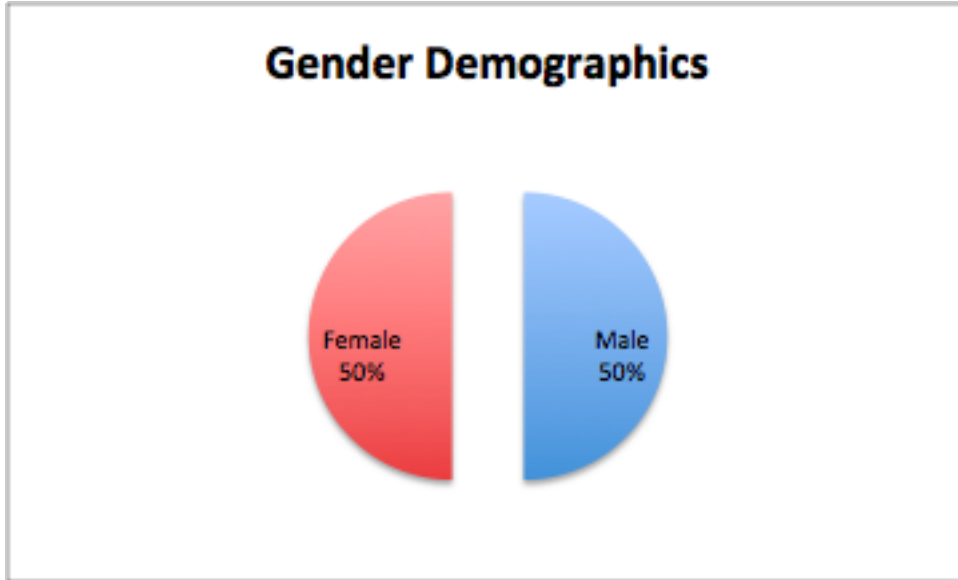
counselors per session; this counselor to camper ratio allows for optimal care to be provided to the campers. With the two locations combined for this study, the survey was sent out to approximately 105 campers. Researchers received feedback from 20 individuals (19% response rate), ranging from ages 22 to 70 (see Figure 1). Furthermore, an equal amount of males and females chose to participate in the electronic survey (see Figure 2). It was also found that 25% of the participants only attended Camp Joy in Georgia, while 45% attended Camp Joy only at the North Carolina location. Moreover, 30% of the individuals attended Camp Joy in both locations (see Figure 3). As one of the initial questions of the survey to prompt the topic of camp, researchers found it necessary to identify which activities were the most enjoyable. Results showed the Nature Walk to be the most favorable activity to participate in, and Shadow Boxing to be the least favorable. Additional results regarding activity preferences can be found in Table 1.

Figure 1:



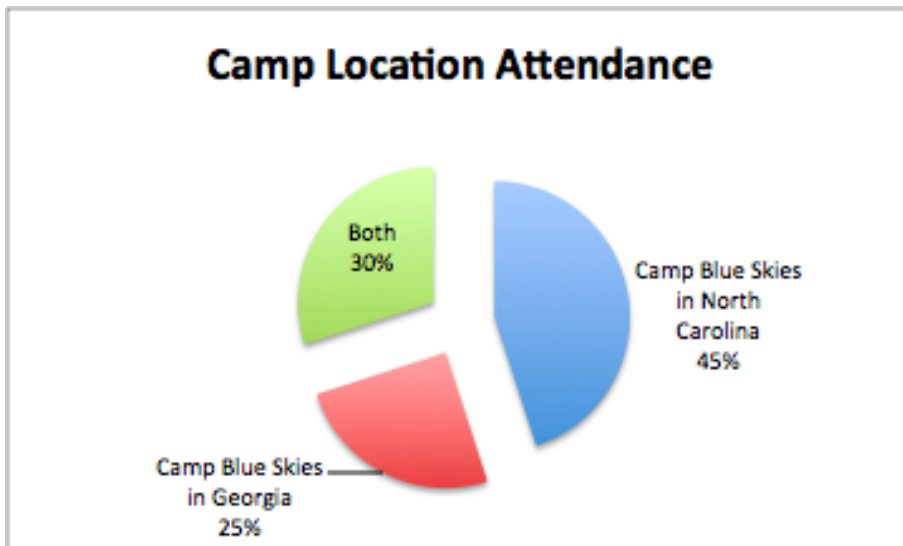
This figure represents age demographics of the camper participants.

Figure 2



This figure represents gender demographics of the camper participants.

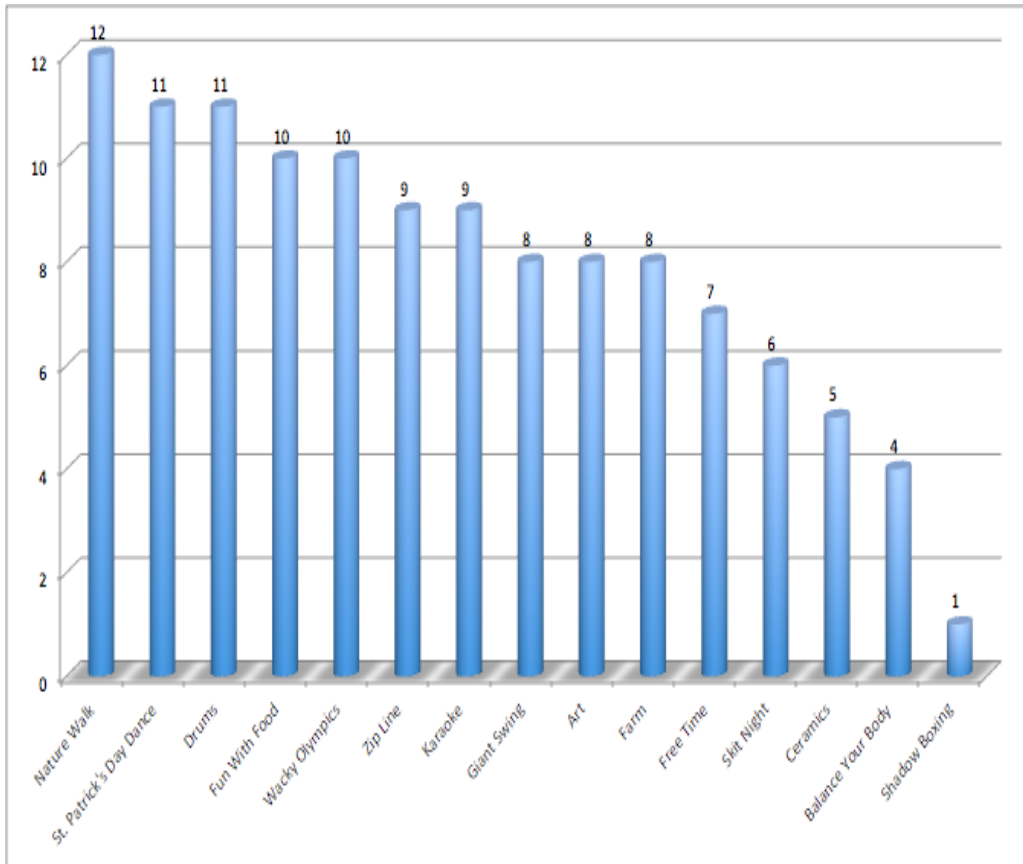
Figure 3



This figure is a representation of where each participant attended camp.



Table 1



This table represents the different activities offered at Camp Joy. The numbers are a representation of the participants who stated they enjoyed the activity.

### *Assessments and Measures*

An electronic survey was developed by the researchers to assess camper perceptions of the camp experience. In order to construct the survey, researchers used the Qualtrics system. This survey directly addressed both the social and practical domains, while the conceptual domain was more indirectly addressed. The first three questions in the survey were presented to gather demographic information. The last 11 questions were open-ended and designed to gain an understanding of the impacts of camp in regards to recreational activities, communication, friendship, leadership, nutrition, independence,

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self-reflection, and emotions. Specifically, a question in the survey asks, “While at camp, what did you learn about yourself?” in order to allow the participant to reflect on their whole self and experience. A direct link to the survey is provided in the Appendix.

### *Procedure*

Mr. Bob Smith, founder of Camp Joy, electronically sent informed consent and informed assent forms to parent(s)/guardian(s) and the campers, along with a survey link. Rather than the researchers sending out the survey themselves, the Camp Founder sent out surveys to an email list of campers and caregivers in order to maintain anonymity of those who chose to participate. In mid-December, an email was sent to 105 campers who had attended either the North Carolina camp or the Georgia camp. By mid-January, a follow-up email was sent out to the same participant list for continued encouragement in completing the survey if they had not already completed it. Researchers closed the survey at the end of the first week of February in order to begin data analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Following the return of the survey responses, researchers created six different documents pertaining to information received through survey responses. Line-by-line coding was done in order to identify recurring themes. Researchers also analyzed data and conducted line-by-line coding according to which camp participants had attended. This process allowed researchers to look for similarities and differences among responses from individuals who participated in the North Carolina camp, the Georgia camp, or both camps. Line-by-line coding is a method that involves scanning each line of data and finding common themes. Sacks (1992) explained the importance for the themes that are gathered to remain useful and not become meaningless. In order to prevent this

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occurrence, a thematic analysis was used; after performing a line-by-line coding, themes were created and organized to correlate with the description of the conceptual, social, and practical domains.

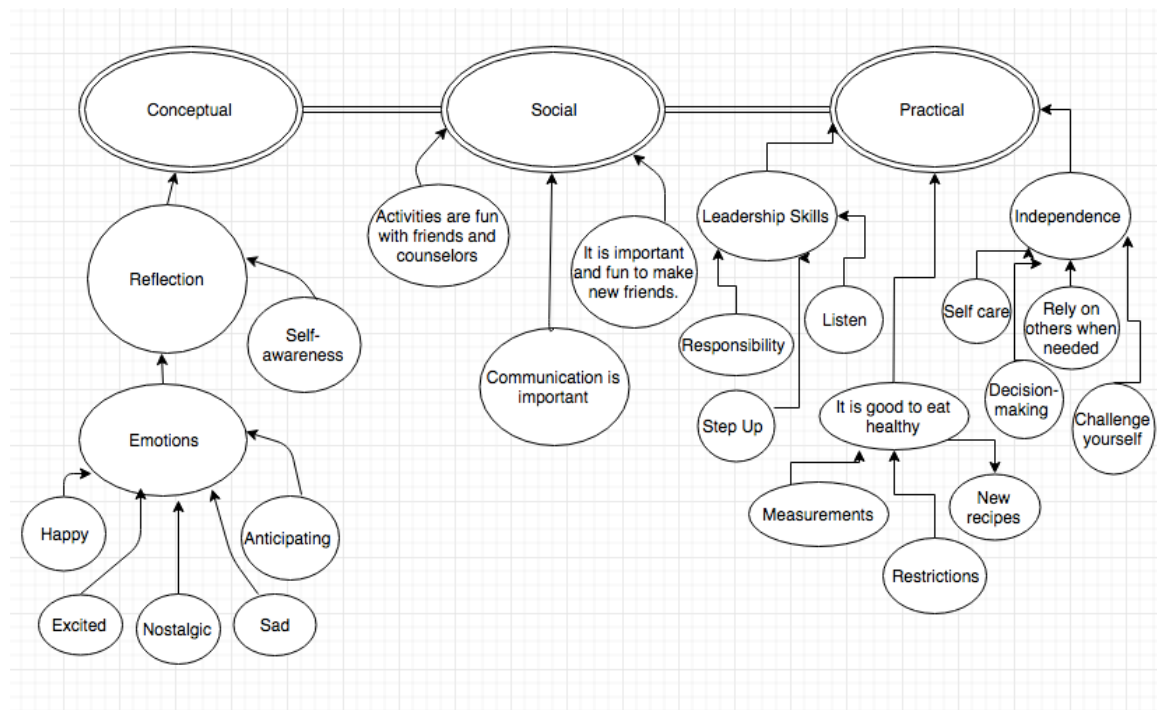
Preceding the completion of this method, a member check was completed. This task was performed in order to build a sense of trust within the data set. According to Silverman (1993), validation is crucial to build when conducting qualitative research. In order for the information to accurately represent the phenomena, researchers must solve the issue of anecdotalism; meaning, researchers must continue to convince the audience that the study limits bias. By completing member checks, as noted by Reason and Rowan (1981), researchers went “back to the subjects with our tentative results and refine[d] them in the light of our subjects’ reactions” (p. 177). With the formal process of gathering respondent validation, trust within the data builds not only within the audience, but also in the participants in having their best interest in mind. To conduct member checks, aggregate themes discovered were sent to participants through a survey and the participants had the opportunity to offer their thoughts and ideas regarding the representation of the themes found. To ensure participant privacy, no individual examples were used when conducting member checks.

## Results

The main focus of this research study was to allow adult campers with ID to portray how the camp environment directly correlated with their enhancement in the conceptual, social, and practical domains. The conceptual domain involves factors such as knowledge, memory, and academia related topics. The social domain relates to one’s ability to make and maintain friends and interpersonal communication skills. Lastly, the

practical domain includes self-management skills such as personal care, job responsibilities, and recreation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 2). After data analysis was completed, participants' responses suggested the existence of several common themes among the three domains. These themes were supported through the member check process. To view this diagram, see Figure 4.

Figure 4



This figure is a representation of each theme the researcher gathered from the participants.

### *Conceptual Domain*

In regards to the conceptual domain, the survey did not directly ask questions involving the factors that formulate this definition. However, time spent at camp was influential enough for participants to be able to answer survey questions 2-9 months after

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camp ended. Specifically, participants were asked to recall how they felt before they arrived at camp, as well as how they felt about leaving camp at the conclusion of the week. The majority of the campers reported they felt “excited” before they arrived at camp, and “sad” about leaving camp. These responses were homogeneous between both locations, and convey that camp had a large impact on their memories and emotions.

Additionally, researchers designed a question to ask the participants what they learned about themselves while at camp. Researchers found it necessary to encourage the campers to further reflect on how their time spent at camp impacted their emotions, personality, and capabilities as an individual. The primary theme that was present in the data was that the participants learned they can be independent, make new friends, discover new enjoyable recreational activities, and are wonderful people. One camper from the Georgia location specifically documented “I can do more than I thought,” and another also from the Georgia camp stated “That I am a good person.” Moreover, one participant who attended camp in North Carolina noted “I am happy at camp.” In asking campers to self-reflect, these individuals were able to realize they were fully himself/herself while in the supportive environment camp provides.

While viewing the diagram represented in Figure 4, it is clear that the main idea that connects with the conceptual domain is reflection. Within this concept, there are two sub-factors- emotions experienced and having self-awareness. As stated above, the two main emotions campers recalled feeling were happiness and sadness. In addition to these, other participants identified feeling excited, nostalgic, and anticipating. Furthermore, participants responses given when asked to reflect on what they learned portrayed that they gained a sense of self. They were able to recognize characteristics they either gained

Perceptions of adults with Intellectual Disabilities on experiences at a weeklong camp or already had. In sum, the data conveyed that study participants possessed knowledge and have retained memory of who they are, and emotions they experience.

### *Social Domain*

A large part of the camp environment was designed to encourage socialization. Relating to the social domain, the overall theme participants conveyed was that they enjoyed the opportunity to socialize with others during activities. Moreover, the participants explained they were able to utilize communication as a tool to develop and refine their ability to express emotions.

In the survey, researchers asked why the campers enjoyed the activities they identified as their favorites. Common answers found among campers were that they enjoyed the activities when they were surrounded by friends and counselors; these comments demonstrated that as long as the campers had some form of social interaction, they enjoyed what they were doing.

Researchers additionally asked what the campers learned about communication while at camp. A main theme concluded is that campers learned communication is important in being respectful, patient, and it is a way to make friends. Participants also demonstrated an understanding of the importance in taking initiative and letting the counselors know what they need. Specifically, one camper who attended at the North Carolina location identified the realization to stand up for himself when necessary. This recognition displayed that the participant gained knowledge of how to handle a conflict using his words.

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The last question pertaining to the social domain asked what the individuals learned about friendships during their week spent at Camp Joy. This question was posed because making friends can be hard for anyone in society; however, those with ID struggle more intensely to make and maintain friendships. Camp is an open opportunity to work on the soft skills concerning this topic. In response to this question, participants reported that it was important and fun to make new friends. The same participant from the North Carolina location who shared his new knowledge in standing up for himself reported that he learned that he “does not have to get along with [his] roommate all the time.” Researchers found this important to recognize, because this camper clearly experienced some form of hardship with others while at camp. Although this is not ideal while at camp due to high expectations, this camper was able to learn how to handle alternative situations and in turn, understand how to better treat new friends. Differently, another participant who attended in North Carolina stated that they learned to “become friends when learning a new activities at camp,” further expressing that they learned to “hang out with new friends after camp.” This is significant in the idea of maintaining friendships, which can generally be a tough concept to grasp.

The results shared above are a direct reflection of the social component in Figure 4. The overarching themes identified by participants included: activities are fun with friends and counselors, communication is important, and it is important and fun to make new friends. These responses were consistent among all study participants, which implies they have an increased awareness that the components of the social domain are significant in every day life.

### *Practical Domain*

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Camp Joy encouraged enhancement in self-management skills. Pertaining to the practical domain, researchers specifically asked what campers learned about leadership while at camp. The umbrella theme participants identified was that being a leader is difficult, but it is important and everyone can do it. In a different manner, some campers conveyed the knowledge they gained about not being the primary leader. Specifically, one camper who attended camp at the Georgia location explained that the “counsellors are the leaders, but you’re responsible for yourself.” Additionally, another camper who went to the North Carolina location expressed that “you have to listen to what the rules are.” Each dimension of leadership described through the survey displayed a wide range of new and beneficial knowledge gained.

Furthermore, camp provided an opportunity to learn about nutrition in a fun and relaxed manner; therefore, researchers asked what the participants learned about eating while at camp. The overall theme found in the data was that the campers felt it was good to eat healthy, and it was fun to learn new recipes. Campers expressed the foods they liked in the cafeteria, types of restrictions they discovered (such as sugar), and information about proper measurements. Oppositely, a camper from the Georgia camp expressed, “I tend to overeat at camp.” Even though this comment is in contrast to the rest, it is significant because it shows that this particular camper was able to identify this factor, and is self-aware of the choices they made while at camp.

The final theme found related to the practical domain was the campers thought it was good to be independent, even though it could be difficult at times. Several participants stated that they enjoyed being independent. One camper in particular from the North Carolina camp defined independence as “doing things for himself.” A majority



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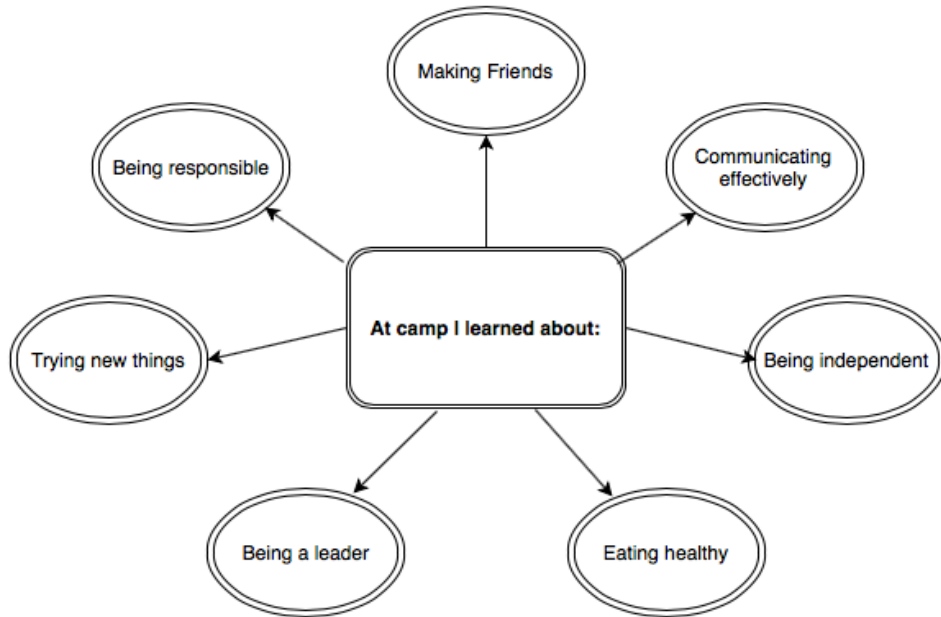
of the participants stated that they learned they can make decisions and take care of themselves. Differently, one camper who attended at the Georgia location stated “we all need other people.” In this case, the camper demonstrated an understanding that independence is important, but it is acceptable to still rely on others as needed.

### *Member Checks*

Researchers conducted a member check in order to validate the identified themes. An image was created in order to represent the gathered themes, and was sent back out to the same 105 campers via Qualtrics Survey (Figure 5). Along with the image, the researchers asked the participants if the image was an accurate representation of their camp experience. The researchers received 10 complete responses from individuals. Nine out of the 10 individuals reported that the image was an accurate representation of their time spent at camp. With this said, one individual who disagreed reported that there “were not enough normal adult activities” that were provided at camp. This deviant case is significant while reviewing results; it is necessary to recognize each individual’s personal perceptions, rather than generalizing the participants and clumping them together. However, this single response did not disprove the total findings.

Lastly, this member check survey asked campers for any final thoughts about their experience at camp. Most individuals had positive comments, and stated that they were excited to get back to camp. Specifically, one respondent said they enjoy attending “because at camp I can become a better person.” This information from the member check validates the findings of the research and supports the identified themes.

Figure 5



This figure is a representation of what was sent back to the participants in order to validate results.

### Discussion

The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of perceptions of adults with ID on experiences at a weeklong camp concerning the conceptual, social, and practical domains. This research found that providing recreational activities which target each domain increased camper functionality, specifically concerning the ideas of: communication, friendships, memory recall, awareness of emotions, leadership, nutrition, independence, and reflection.

#### *Conceptual Domain*

As discussed in prior literature, studies have shown that purposeful use of physical activity interventions during breaks in a classroom setting can increase one's mathematical skills (Everhart et al., 2014). Additionally, it was recognized that after a Yoga session was implemented at school, behavioral disruption decreased, and students were able to find enjoyment in learning (Rommel & Anderson, 2013). Similar findings were discovered in the current research related to the conceptual domain. Although this study did not directly address concepts of academic knowledge, it did address camper memory skills. In terms of the literature review, it is assumed that if recreation continues to be provided for individuals with ID they will progress in their academic skills in regards to cognition; meaning, they will have to build on their memory as the class lessons build up. In the current research study, participants showed remarkable memory recall concerning what they learned while at camp. Their memory recall was clearly demonstrated, suggesting that recreation activities, such as camp, may be beneficial at increasing the memory recall of adults with ID.

#### *Social Domain*

In addition to the conceptual domain, several factors of the social domain directly correlated to the reviewed the literature and the current research study. Specifically, the idea of feeling accepted, increased confidence (Parker 1998), and making and maintaining friendships (Siperstein et al., 2007) were identified in both the literature review as well as the current study. Participants of this study reported that “talking with other people is good and that is how you make friends too” as well as “you have to be understanding of others.” These statements convey the message that the participants at Camp Joy understand that it is important to communicate with people in order to make

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and maintain friends. Moreover, it is necessary to be understanding of others to help others feel accepted. From this finding, we can summarize that a one-week camp experience such as Camp Joy has the potential to positively impact behaviors in the social domain.

### *Practical Domain*

Lastly, there were direct connections within the literature and the current study in regards to the practical domain. The survey information gathered from the participants at Camp Joy showed that they learned what it means to be a leader. One camper defined leadership as “when you take charge of things,” while another camper explained leadership as “you have to listen to what the rules are.” Furthermore, campers’ responses suggested that they learned they could take care of themselves. This displays they learned valuable self-management skills in personal care and taking initiative, similar to studies conducted by researchers Zhang, Weideman, Bogard, and Chiotti (2013). Their study showed improved ability to follow directions in task-analysis steps, as well as taking initiative. These findings related to the practical domain further relate to the study previously discussed by Pueschel (1996), where participants had the opportunity to practice leadership skills through the use of a tablet. As they practiced these skills, their motivation to display good behavior increased, just as the campers at Camp Joy did through following rules.

After reviewing overall findings, the current study results suggest that a camp environment such as Camp Joy presents the opportunity to increase functioning in the conceptual, social, and practical domains. Study findings suggest that campers have a better understanding of: communication, friendships, memory recall, awareness of

Perceptions of adults with Intellectual Disabilities on experiences at a weeklong camp emotions, leadership, nutrition, independence, and reflection. These findings seem to fill a gap where individuals with ID experience some level of deficits, and study findings suggest that recreation participation in a camp setting has the potential to increase perceived impacts of these domains. Finally, one gap in the reviewed literature was the absence of participant voices; many studies relied on caregivers and other participants for their findings. In the current research, this gap was filled by allowing study participants to speak for themselves and allowed their voices to be heard through their responses to open ended research questions.

#### Limitations and Future Directions

Although study findings suggested that participants experienced positive growth in the conceptual, social, and practical domains, there were some limitations. First, researchers reached out to a large number of campers (105), yet received limited full responses (20). The minimal amount of data the researchers received served as a weakness because it left them with limited data to analyze. Another limitation involved the posed research question; the existing literature does not contain direct participant responses, whereas the current study attempted to gather data from the participants themselves. Therefore, a baseline for data collection could not be provided since this topic has yet to be explored by other researchers. A final limitation was the brevity of responses. While some research participants provided a full response, others only provided only one-worded answers, or left a question completely blank. With responses that were brief, researchers had a narrow set of findings to work with. Finally, this research was conducted three to nine months after camp participation. This gap in time

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between the experience and collecting data may have had an impact on the quality of data provided.

For future research studies, it is recommended that researchers have more than one resource to reach participants for data collection. For this particular study, researchers only reached out to campers via email; some campers potentially do not have an accessible email account, leaving them unable to complete the survey. It would be beneficial for future researchers to utilize more than one resource in order to avoid minimal data sets. Additionally, it would be beneficial for future researchers to reach out to other camps that host this population. This would further validate our results, as well as find any additional comments or suggestions. Another suggestion to future researchers is to conduct a longitudinal study where data are collected directly after camp concludes, again after six months have passed, and once more after one year. This would be helpful in tracking perceived impacts the campers experience over time. Furthermore, it would be helpful for future researchers to ask the caregivers as well as staff/counselors if they noticed these changes within the campers throughout the week. This would additional information would be helpful to gain insight from an outsider's perspective. Lastly, it would be helpful to go back and further investigate any deviant cases that arise. Each camper will have a different experience, so any differentiating response is important to consider in order to further enhance the camp experience.

### Summary

This research study was conducted to understand perceptions of adults with ID after participating in a weeklong camp. In order to conduct this study, a survey was administered to approximately 105 campers through Qualtrics Survey. The survey

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contained questions in regards to participant experiences at camp, specifically related to the conceptual, social, and practical domains. Study findings suggest that in the conceptual domain, participants were able to reflect, demonstrate self-awareness, and demonstrate emotions. In the social domain, participants were able to articulate the importance of engaging with others in activities, the importance of communication, and the value of making new friends. Finally, in the practical domain, study participants suggested the importance of leadership, eating healthy, and independence. These results were supported by a member check designed to ensure trustworthiness of the results. In conclusion, study results imply that participation in a week-long camp experience has the potential to improve adults with ID abilities in the conceptual, social, and practical domains.

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### Appendix

The survey the participants received consisted of questions in the social, and practical domains, as well as quality of life. There are three questions in regards to the social domain, four questions measuring the practical domain, and two questions to understand the campers' perceived quality of life. The survey as a whole measures cognition to contribute to the conceptual domain. Below is the survey containing questions with an interest of their time spent at camp, as well as the follow up survey as a part of the member check process.

#### Initial Survey Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. Are you male or female?
3. Which Camp Blue Skies camp did you attend?
4. How did you feel before you arrived at camp?
5. What were your favorite activities at camp? (check boxes)
  - Giant Swing
  - Ceramics
  - Art
  - Nature Walk
  - Balance Your Body
  - Shadow Boxing
  - Fun with Food
  - Zip Line
  - Skit Night
  - Karaoke
  - St. Patrick's Day Dance
  - Wacky Olympics

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-Drums

-Farm

-Free Time

6. Why did you like these activities?
7. While at camp what did you learn about communicating with others?
8. While at camp, what did you learn about friendships?
9. While at camp, what did you learn about leadership?
10. While at camp, what did you learn about eating?
11. While at camp, what did you learn about independence?
12. While at camp, what did you learn about yourself?
13. Is there anything else that you learned while at camp?
14. How did you feel about leaving camp?

[https://az1.qualtrics.com/jfe3/preview/SV\\_eJONpLN2k8YmNHD](https://az1.qualtrics.com/jfe3/preview/SV_eJONpLN2k8YmNHD)

### Follow-Up Survey Questions:

1. Do you feel the words in the image below describe your experience at camp?
2. Why or why not?
3. Do you have any other thoughts about camp?

[https://qtrial2015az1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5t2VUSf3MqfaFAF](https://qtrial2015az1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5t2VUSf3MqfaFAF)