

Different Styles Reach Different Kids: An empirical enquiry into Young Life Camping Outreach Programs in the USA and Europe

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Abstract

As part of a larger study on ‘spiritual fruit formation’ in adolescents, teenaged participants in Young Life outreach “camping” programs completed surveys immediately before and immediately after the camping experience. Participants were American teens attending standard Young Life camps in the United States (Lake Champion, New York and Sharp Top Cove, Georgia) in summer 2007 and teens from international schools from six European nations (primarily American and British by birth) attending a service-oriented Young Life camp in Kovachevzi, Bulgaria, spring 2007. The outreach components of both types of camps (including talks, small group discussions, special music, games and skits) were similar as they were conducted by American Young Life program staff. Nevertheless, personality inventories revealed that a different profile of teen was more likely to ‘make a commitment to God’ during the Young Life service trip as compared with the standard Young Life camp. ‘Making a decision’ at standard Young Life camps was predicted by high extroversion and high emotional instability; whereas those teens that made a decision during the service trip were high on introversion and intellectual curiosity. Results suggest that different types of outreach camping experiences may be better at preparing different types of kids to respond positively to the Gospel message.

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Young Life has been doing Christian evangelistic outreach camping with teens for decades. Their oldest camping property in continuous operation, Frontier Ranch in Buena Vista, Colorado, was established during World War II. Young Life conducts hundreds of outreach camps—at their own properties and elsewhere—around the world every year, but the vast majority of these camps are unified by a characteristic programmatic structure. In an attempt to standardize ‘best practices’ Young Life camp programs tend to include a certain number of characteristic features at the core being the Young Life ‘club’ and talk progression. This ‘Standard Model’ of Young Life camping has been a key tool for Young Life to effectively reach ‘every kid, everywhere, for eternity’--a recent mission motto.

Whether the Standard Model does reach every kid, everywhere with equal effectiveness may be decomposed into several empirical questions. Does the Standard Model equally impact kids of different socioeconomic groups? Different ethnicities, nationalities, or language groups? Different ages, from pre-teens to late adolescents? Males and females? The present study takes up the question of whether the Standard Model is equally effective with teens with different personality types. Our null hypothesis is that regardless of teens’ personalities at the beginning of Young Life camp (as measured by a “big five” personality inventory), teens will be equally likely to respond to the Standard Model camping program with a commitment to Christ. That is, whether or not a teen is extroverted, intellectually open, emotionally unstable, highly conscientious, or highly agreeable should have no relationship with whether the teen made a commitment to God at the end of the camp week. In support of this hypothesis, the correlations between personality traits and various indicators of religiousness in most prior research tend to be modest.^{1&2} Based on these findings, we would predict little effect for personality. Alternatively, it could be that the Standard Model is more effective with kids of different personality types. Agreeableness and conscientiousness are two of the Big 5 factors that have been shown to be positively related to religious involvement¹. In addition, extraversion is positively, albeit weakly, associated with the more social aspects of religion (e.g. church attendance, sense of connectedness)². Given the strong interpersonal component inherent in the Young Life model, extraverts and highly agreeable individuals may be more likely to respond positively by making a commitment to Christ.

We tested the hypothesis by examining two Young Life samples. The first sample consisted of two Young Life camp trips from Upstate New York, one to Young Life's Sharp Top Cove property in Georgia and the other to Young Life's Lake Champion property in New York State. The second sample consisted of participants in a Young Life Continental Europe outreach service week in Bulgaria. Both samples of teens experienced the Standard Model of Young Life camping but those in the United States experienced it at Young Life's custom-built properties whereas the Bulgaria sample stayed in a former Soviet youth facility and spent a large part of their week working at orphanages.

The 'Standard Model' of Young Life Camping Program

Activities to build trusting relationships. Team activities are scheduled at every camp to foster trust, companionship and relationship building among members of a cabin and members of the camp as a whole. Cabin activities, done together as a cabin group of 10-12 teens, vary across camps but may include the high ropes course, horseback riding, mountain biking, or parasailing. Other camp activities, such as the square dance, rodeo or field games, combine different cabins to foster pan-camp unity.

Free time. Free time is a common facet of all young life camps and is designed to give leaders and campers time for one-on-one conversations and time to enjoy and explore the camp facilities. It generally increases as the duration of camp progresses following the rationale that as the content of the messages (discussed below) becomes more intense, the opportunities to discuss or process the messages with a cabin leader increase.³

Clubs. Clubs occur at least once each day at Young Life camps, and sometimes more than once depending on the duration of the camp. They have been described as "organized chaos" and usually involve group singing, a game, a skit, and a short (20-30 minute), message. To illustrate, a typical club begins with the singing of three upbeat, secular songs. These songs are followed by a zany game such as 'musical pies' (think musical chairs but the odd-person gets a pie in the face) or 'bobbing for apples in baked beans'. Following the game, the group sings two medium-tempo, secular songs, then watches a funny skit or video. After the skit the group sings two slower, religious content songs, as a precursor to the talk, which is the final programmatic element of club. The talk typically ends with a short, one to two sentence prayer.

Club Talk Progression. Young Life talks follow a standard progression across most camps. The introductory message is usually about the goodness of God and the goodness of the created world (Genesis 1). The next two or three talks focus on the life and attributes of Jesus, possibly highlighting his compassion, power, humanity, or divinity and are usually illustrated with accounts from the Gospels. After these ‘person talks’ there is typically a talk about the human condition, sin, and human brokenness. The ‘sin talk’ precedes the ‘cross talk’, which explains the events and redemptive significance of Jesus’ death. The progression ends with one or two messages about Jesus’ resurrection and ways to appropriate the Gospel in one’s life.

Cabin times. Cabin times occur after each club talk. They are designed to give campers the opportunity to discuss, reflect upon, and process the messages. Volunteer leaders facilitate cabin times by helping set and enforce ground rules (e.g. confidentiality, respect for others) and by posing questions to help generate discussion. Typically the members of one cabin have cabin times together and cabin times last between twenty to forty minutes, though duration of discussion varies across cabins.

Twenty Minutes of Silence. Periods of silence are meant to provide campers with an extra opportunity to reflect on the messages and respond to them if they choose. Each camp has at least one 20 minute period of silence, but sometimes two, one following the cross talk and one after the resurrection/appropriation talk. To prepare for these times campers are instructed to find a quiet spot alone on the camp’s property and are asked to remain silent for twenty minutes. The twenty minutes is followed by cabin time. Campers may use the twenty minutes of silence however they choose, but are asked not to talk to their friends or return to their cabins until the period is complete.

Say So. The ‘Say So’ provides campers with the opportunity to declare before the entire camp that they have made a commitment or recommitment to God as a result of their camp experience. Usually before campers board busses to return home, they gather for one last meeting where the camp speaker explains the ‘Say So’ and passes a microphone around to those who want to participate. Participants typically stand and share a once sentence declaration of their faith, such as “My name is Toby and this week I gave my life to God.” The entire camp typically applauds after all pronouncements have been made.

Variable Features of Young Life Camping

Around what we are calling the Standard Model, Young Life camping features often vary depending upon the nature of the facilities, the setting, and the type of camping experience. For instance, sports camps might include athletic activities and instruction. Service camps (such as the one in Bulgaria considered below) include occasions for teens to work in service of others. Some Young Life camps at Young Life properties include lots of big-ticket activities such as water-skiing, tubing, horse-back riding, and parasailing. Other facilities used for Young Life camping have more modest offerings.

In the present study, the null hypothesis that the Standard Model is equally effective with all personality types was tested across two camp settings. The first sample represented a typical American outreach camp setting. The second sample was an instance of a service camp setting. If the Standard Model is the key to effectively communicating the Gospel and prompting teens to make a commitment to God, then these variable features should make no difference beyond the differences in the teens themselves. That is, a second null hypothesis is that the setting of the Young Life camp would not bear upon any detected relationship between personality of the teens and whether they make a commitment.

American Outreach Camp Setting. The first sample consisted of teens from Upstate New York attending Young Life summer camp at one of two Young Life properties in the United States, custom-built to serve as outreach camping facilities. Teens stayed in dormitories rather than tents or cabins, though the term ‘cabin’ is used to refer to dormitory rooms. Meals were served by volunteers in a dining hall staffed by food service professionals. Clubs took place in an auditorium with a stage, sound, light, and audio-visual projection system. Both of the properties attended had lakes and waterfront activities such as sailing, canoeing, and zip-lining into the lake. One property also featured tubing behind jet-skis as an activity. Away from the lake, the properties had high-element challenge courses, a climbing wall, Frisbee-golf, a game room (with billiards and table tennis), and other activities.

Bulgaria Service Week Camp Setting. The Bulgaria service week took place during the school break of Easter week. This camp required teens from Young Life

ministries in six different European countries to fly to Sofia, Bulgaria and then bus approximately 90 minutes to the town of Kovachevzi where they lodged in a former Soviet youth facility—incomplete and in poor repair. For four of the days teens rode coaches to one of five orphanage work sites immediately after breakfast, worked for six to eight hours, and then returned to Kovachevzi. Work projects included indoor and outdoor painting, playground repair and installation, assembling and painting cribs, building fences, and other general maintenance. In sites with older children, the teen ‘campers’ spent some time interacting with the orphans in work, play, and conversation (facilitated by translators).

On days without work and in the evenings after work, campers participated in the Standard Model program of activities. The program team, speaker, special musician, and camp director were all American citizens with experience conducting Young Life camps in the United States as described above. Skits, songs, games, welcomes, entertainment, clubs and the club talk progression were all easily recognizable as the same that are used in Young Life camps in the United States.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited as part of a larger multi-national project exploring spiritual transformation and character development among teens. Young Life areas and regions were contacted to assist in recruiting participants with the approval of Young Life’s central leadership. Two Young Life area directors from Upstate New York volunteered to assist in the project as did the regional director responsible for the camp in Bulgaria. The Young Life areas in New York administered consent forms at their parent-information meetings before their annual summer camp trips and on the day of departure to camp. All teens (not volunteer leaders) on the camp trips were invited to participate for a payment reward of 25 U.S. dollars. Similarly, participants in the Bulgaria study were given consent forms before their participation in the Young Life trip to cover all activities during the camp and an additional consent form for the study upon arrival. All participants in the camp, regardless of which Young Life area they came from, were invited to participate for a cash reward of 25 Euros.

The New York sample included 35 teens (18 male, 16 female) from the Rochester area and 60 teens (20 male, 40 female) from the area that includes urban Syracuse and parts of the suburbs. Ages ranged from 14 to 19 with a mean age of 16.8 ($SD = 1.22$). Because no noteworthy differences on variables of interest were detected, these two areas (from the same Young Life region) are combined for the sake of this study. Of the New York sample, 81.2% ($N = 77$) were Caucasian, 1.1% ($N = 4$) were African American, 1.1% ($N = 1$) were Hispanic Latino, 1.1% ($N = 1$) were Asian American and 14.7% ($N = 14$) did not report their ethnicity. Regarding religion, 41.1% ($N = 39$) identified themselves as Christian/Protestant, 46.3% ($N = 44$) identified as Christian/Catholic, 11.6% ($N = 11$) identified as other and 1 response was missing.

The Bulgaria sample included 140 teens (62 male, 75 female, 3 not specified), ranging in age from 14 to 19 years old with a mean age of 16.8 years ($SD = 1.22$).⁴ Participants resided in seven different European nations, the United Kingdom ($N=48$), Belgium ($N = 30$), Germany ($N = 30$), France ($N = 12$), Norway ($N = 8$), Portugal ($N = 7$), and Switzerland ($N = 1$). According to the camp director, nearly all teens were students at international schools (English language based curricula) and more than two-thirds were United States citizens with British citizens being the next greatest proportion. The vast majority identified themselves as “Caucasian/European descent” (85.7 percent) with no other racial or ethnic identification comprising more than 3 percent of the sample. Given this homogeneity, for the sake of the present study all groups were treated as a single sample. More than two-thirds of participants identified themselves (before camp) as a Christian (59.4 percent, Protestant; 25.6 percent, Catholic), with 6.8 percent calling themselves atheist or agnostic, 2.3 percent calling themselves Jewish, and the remaining 6.1 percent identifying with other religions. Two-thirds (67.9 percent) had attended at least one Young Life event previously.

Materials

Participants completed a pre-camp survey and a post-camp survey. The pre-camp survey included a number of personality, well-being, and virtues inventories as well as questions about previous Young Life involvement and relationships. A more detailed listing appears in Table 1.

Table 1

| Scale/Questions ⁶ | Source |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Strivings – list 5 ⁶ | Emmons, 1999 |
| Strivings Instrumentality Matrix ⁶ | Emmons, 1999 |
| Strivings Ratings ⁶ | Emmons, 1999 |
| sanctification | |
| meaning | |
| support | |
| extrinsic/intrinsic | |
| Life Regard Index ⁷ | Battista & Almond, 1973 |
| Religious Commitment Inventory ⁸ | Worthington, et al, 2003 |
| Spiritual Transcendence Index ⁹ | Seidlitz, et al, 2002 |
| BFI ¹⁰ | John and Srivastava, 1999 |
| Social and Personal Responsibility Scale ¹¹ | Conrad and Hedin, 1981 |
| Rosenberg Self-esteem ¹² | Rosenberg, 1965 |
| GQ-6 ¹³ | McCullough, 2002 |
| SWLS ¹⁴ | Diener, et al, 1985 |
| Hope Scale from VIA ¹⁵ | Snyder, et al 1996 |
| Vitality ¹⁶ | Bostic, Rubio, and Hood, 2000 |
| Patience Scale ¹⁷ | Schnitker and Emmons, 2007 |
| Self-Regulation from VIA ¹⁵ | Snyder, et al, 1996 |
| R-UCLA loneliness ¹⁸ | McWhirter 1990 |
| CES-D (depression) ¹⁹ | Kohut, et al. 1993 |
| Religious Coping ²⁰ | Pargament et al., 1988 |
| Young Life participation questions | |
| Question regarding previous spiritual transformation | |
| Demographics | |
| Gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, grade, religion, denomination, number of older and younger siblings, parents' ages and religiosity | |

The post-camp survey consisted of questions regarding campers' evaluations of various components of the camping experience as well as the central outcome questions regarding whether or not they made a decision to commit their lives to God at camp.

Nearly all were closed-ended questions. Table 2 lists the questions without the answer choice options. Not all follow-up questions proved important for the analyses presented below, thus, some are omitted from this list.

Table 2

1. Think about the Young Life leader with whom you had the closest relationship (before camp). Was that leader on the camp trip?
If you answered Yes to #1, Was that leader in your cabin?
2. Think about the Young Life leader in your cabin that you spent the most time with during your week at camp for questions 2a through 2d.
 - 2a. How would you characterize your relationship with him/her before camp?
 - 2b. How would you characterize your relationship with him/her now?
 - 2c. Has anything changed in your relationship? Please briefly describe the change:
 - 2d. About how many times did you talk with her/him one-on-one about something important to you?
3. Before this camp trip, how many times had you gone to Young Life or Wyldlife summer camp?
4. Did you go to camp with any of your close friends?
5. Which, if any, of the following Young Life special events did you participate in at camp?
6. Do you feel that you got enough sleep while at camp?
7. Do you feel that you got enough to eat while at camp?
8. How would you rate the quality of the food at camp?
9. How much did you have to pay yourself for your camp trip?
10. Did you have to work to fundraise part or all of your camp trip?
11. Think about the talks at camp for questions 11a through 11d.
 - 11a. How would you rate the length of the talks?
 - 11b. Were the talks understandable?
 - 11c. Were the talks engaging?
 - 11d. Were the talks entertaining?
12. Did you attend a sex and dating seminar?
If yes, did you find the seminar helpful?
13. Did you attend a tough questions seminar?
If yes, did you find the seminar helpful?
14. Think about your cabin times.

- 14a. Did you feel comfortable sharing during cabin time?
- 14b. Did you feel like people listened to each other during cabin time?
- 14c. How would you judge the length of cabin times?
- 14d. Did you get questions answered during cabin times?
- 14e. Did you enjoy the cabin times?
15. Did you make a decision to commit your life to God for the *first time* at camp?
If yes, have you told anyone about your decision?
16. Did you make a decision to re-commit your life to God at camp?
17. At the end of the week campers were invited to stand up in front of everyone and say if they had committed their life to God. Did you stand up and express commitment?
18. How many of your friends stood up and expressed a commitment?
19. In the space below, if you desire, please list any other comments you would like to communicate to the Young Life organizers.

Procedure

Members of the New York sample completed the pre-camp survey on the bus-ride to camp and the post-camp survey on the bus ride home from camp. They were given payment as they left the bus. The survey was administered by the camp trip leaders. Teens were encouraged to complete the survey independently and without discussion with their friends.

After being welcomed to the camp and settling in their rooms, the Bulgaria participants assembled in the dining hall and completed the pre-camp survey under supervision of the first author with the assistance of the camp nurses. Teens were encouraged to complete the survey independently and without discussion with their friends. The post-camp survey was administered similarly at the conclusion of the camp programmed activities before students departed the property. Upon completion of the second survey, participants received compensation.

Results

To recap, the primary research question was whether or not Young Life's standard model of camping was equally effective in reaching adolescents with different personality types. A corollary to this question asked whether or not certain camp

settings affected the impact of the camping experience depending on participants' personality types.

To investigate these questions, we tabulated the average score for each of the five personality traits measured by the 44-item Big Five Inventory⁷ in the New York and Bulgaria samples. The five traits were extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism/emotional instability, and intellectual curiosity/openness. Both samples had similar personality compositions, with most means differing by only a few tenths. The means for conscientiousness in both samples were equal. See Table 3 for a summary of results.²¹

Table 3: Big Five Personality Traits

| Personality Trait | New York Mean (SD) | Bulgaria Mean (SD) |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Extraversion | 3.54 (0.72) | 3.48 (0.78) |
| Agreeableness | 3.73 (0.57) | 3.69 (0.62) |
| Conscientiousness | 3.25 (0.58) | 3.25 (0.66) |
| Neuroticism (i.e. emotional instability) | 2.88 (0.74) | 2.89 (0.74) |
| Openness (i.e., intellectual curiosity) | 3.56 (0.57) | 3.72 (0.60) |

New York $N = 97$; Bulgaria $N = 137$

We used the Big Five scores as predictor variables of whether or not campers made a decision to either become Christians or to rededicate their lives to Christ.²² Because the outcome variable (decision or not) was dichotomous, a binary logistic regression analysis was used with the other inventories, indexes, Young Life participation and camp evaluation questions entered into the model as co-variables. That is, analyses attempted to isolate statistically the influence of Big Five personality dimensions independent of the other measured factors.²³ Logistic regression analyses were conducted using SPSS 15.0 software for Windows with all predictor variables and covariates entered at once initially. Analyses were re-run eliminating factors that demonstrated no significant partial relationship with the outcome variable until only predictor variables and co-variables remained that had significant partial correlations with whether teens made a decision (alpha level = 0.05).

In the New York sample, five factors significantly affected the primary outcome. Two of these factors pertained to personality type. Participants who were

more extroverted and more emotionally volatile (as measured by the ‘neuroticism’ subscale of the Big Five) were more likely to make a commitment or recommitment to God ($p = .031$ and $p = .005$, respectively). No other personality traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, or intellectual curiosity/openness) significantly affected participants’ likelihood of making a commitment or recommitment. Participants who were more depressed and who had previously attended a Young Life or Wyldlife camp²⁴ were less likely to commit or recommit, while those who gave high ratings to the quality of the food were more likely to make a commitment. Previous camp attendance was measured as a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 5 previous trips to Young Life (or Wyldlife) camp. The partial relationship detected indicates that teens that had attended many Young Life camps were less likely to make a commitment decision during this camp week. In total 15 of 108 campers (13.9 percent) made a first time decision to follow Christ, and 65 (60.2%) made a recommitment. The final regression model results are represented by Table 4.

Table 4: New York Regression Statistics Predicting Commitment

| Factor | B | S.E. | Wald | df | p | Exp(B) |
|------------------------|--------|-------|-------|----|------|--------|
| Depression | -1.218 | .528 | 5.314 | 1 | .021 | .296 |
| Extraversion | 1.002 | .463 | 4.675 | 1 | .031 | 2.723 |
| Neuroticism | 1.515 | .543 | 7.789 | 1 | .005 | 4.550 |
| Previous trips to camp | -.542 | .213 | 6.444 | 1 | .011 | .582 |
| Food quality | .886 | .391 | 5.131 | 1 | .024 | 2.425 |
| Constant | -7.902 | 3.249 | 5.915 | 1 | .015 | .000 |

$N = 93$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.323$

Binary Logistic Regression Stepwise Likelihood Ratio; When Exp(B) is greater than 1,

increasing values of the variable correspond to increasing odds of the event’s occurrence;

When Exp(B) is less than 1, increasing values of the variable correspond to decreasing odds of the event’s occurrence.

In the Bulgaria sample, three factors, two related to personality, significantly affected participants’ likelihood of making a commitment or recommitment to God. Participants who were more extroverted were less likely to make a commitment ($p = .007$) and participants who were more intellectually curious (the ‘openness’ subscale of the Big Five) were more likely to make a commitment ($p = .039$). The only other factor that significantly affected participants’ likelihood of making a commitment

was whether or not they found the talks entertaining.²⁵ Those who found the talks more entertaining were more likely to make a commitment or recommitment to God ($p = .027$). Three of 145 (2 percent) reported making a first-time commitment to God and 52 reported making a recommitment (35.9 percent), eight who answered the after-camp survey did not report whether or not they had made a commitment decision. Table 5 summarizes the analyses results for the Bulgaria sample.

Table 5: Bulgaria Regression Statistics Predicting Commitment

| Factor | B | S.E. | Wald | df | p | Exp(B) |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----|------|--------|
| Extraversion | -.777 | .289 | 7.212 | 1 | .007 | .460 |
| Openness | .754 | .365 | 4.272 | 1 | .039 | 2.125 |
| Found Talks Entertaining | -.778 | .351 | 4.913 | 1 | .027 | .459 |
| Constant | .422 | 1.518 | .077 | 1 | .781 | 1.525 |

$N = 127$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.180$

Binary Logistic Regression Stepwise Likelihood Ratio; When Exp(B) is greater than 1, increasing values of the variable correspond to increasing odds of the event's occurrence; When Exp(B) is less than 1, increasing values of the variable correspond to decreasing odds of the event's occurrence.

Discussion & Conclusion

Does Young Life's Standard Model for camping encourage commitments to God by some teens more effectively than others? Analyses of data from both samples allow us to reject the first null hypothesis that teens of all personalities are equally likely to make a commitment to God after experiencing the Standard Model. In the case of the New York sample, teens that scored high on extraversion and emotional instability ('neuroticism') were more likely to make a decision at the end of the camp week (controlling for the influence of other statistically significant factors). Likewise, in the Bulgaria sample not every camper was equally likely to make a commitment to God. Rather, those that scored low on extraversion—that is, introverted teens—and those high on intellectual curiosity ('openness') were more likely to report a new commitment by the end of the week. Our study then extends and expands previous research on links between the Big 5 model of personality and religious involvement which has largely reported that Conscientiousness and Agreeableness are the only two domains that consistently related to indicators of religiousness. Introversion and openness are generally uncorrelated with religiousness. Therefore, making a commitment to God may

represent a previously unexplored aspect of personal religiousness that bears study in its own right.

This difference in personality profile that contributed to teens being ‘at risk’ of making a commitment to God, allows us to reject our second null hypothesis. It was not the case that the relationship between personality and outcomes of the Standard Model were consistent across camping contexts. Different sorts of kids appear to have been impacted by the Standard Model when actualized in the context of Young Life outreach camping at Young Life properties versus the context of a service work camp in a former Soviet youth facility. Most striking was a complete reversal in the relationship between extraversion and spiritual decision-making. To caricature the profiles a bit, we seem to have two different sorts of teens tending to make decisions in the two camping contexts under consideration. In the more traditional Young Life camping context we see emotionally unstable, highly extroverted teens making a first decision or rededication to Christ during the course of the week. In some ways this looks like a stereotypical ‘mountain top high’ effect where socially-outgoing kids that are emotionally reactive get worked up into a collective frenzy and make a snap decision that they need Jesus in their lives. But the same type basic camping program activities (the Standard Model) with predominantly American kids with similar ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds set in a service week context yielded a different picture of Young Life evangelistic dynamics.²⁶ In Bulgaria, instead of the emotional socialites making decisions it was more likely to be the brooding intellectual-types. The relatively introverted, intellectually curious teens responded to the meaning of their service experiences and the reasoned presentation of the Gospel. Perhaps we have one instantiation of the Standard Model of Young Life camping proving effective because of the *pathos* of the presentation, but in another context it is the *logos* that carries the day.

It is tempting to place the explanatory weight of the observed differences on the divergent programmatic features of the camps—fun recreation and adventure versus sobering confrontation with poverty and hard work. Given the innumerable other differences between the two samples, such a conclusion would be hasty. It may be that the differences between the two types of camping experiences are more attributable to the populations of campers along dimensions not captured in the surveys, or the particulars of the program team, accommodations, food, time of year, and so forth. At this point we only conclude that some collection of differences between the camping

experiences led to teens of very different personality profiles being more or less receptive to the Gospel presentation through Young Life's Standard Model.

In the New York sample, three other factors appeared to contribute significantly to whether or not teens made a spiritual decision during camp: depression (as measured by the CES-D inventory), previous camp attendance, and evaluation of the food quality. As these three variables were included as co-variables and were not strongly motivated, they should be interpreted with caution as they could be spurious findings associated with testing a large number of variables. Follow-up studies would give us more confidence about the importance of all of these variables. Nevertheless, at least the first two significant co-variables make some intuitive sense. Individuals suffering from high levels of depression often suffer from low motivation levels that might have worked against seriously engaging with camp activities including the Gospel presentation let alone any kind of potentially life-changing decision. Further, Young Life areas often discourage high levels of repeat attendance at Young Life camp unless those teens are bringing friends with them to camp or are serving in a 'junior leader' capacity. Hence, those teens that do attend for the fourth or fifth time may already have high levels of commitment to God and so a first commitment or rededication seem less likely than for teens attending Young Life camp for the first or second time. Note that the detected relationship between previous camp attendance and decisions was not compromised by including age of the campers in the model. That is, it does not appear that simply being older works against decisions, but rather numbers of times at Young Life camp.

What about the food? Though Young Life food service managers may be excited by the fact that the food was the only 'programmatic' factor found to impact decisions, the detected relationship should be interpreted with caution. Even if not a spurious correlation, it could be that high food quality ratings is serving as a proxy for some more general positive feelings toward the overall camping experience. Young Life camping is distinctive, however, by the relative high quality and care taken in food provision. Meals commonly feature fresh-baked breads and desserts as well as kid-pleasing dishes such as spaghetti, pizza, tacos, burgers, barbecued chicken, and even a steak dinner. Themed meals with costumed servers are normal at the Young Life-owned properties. Young Life justifies the extra expense and staff needed to serve such elaborate meals by suggesting that it helps campers feel loved and cared for. Perhaps we have detected some evidence of such a dynamic.

In the Bulgaria sample only one co-variate was found to impact commitment decisions: whether the talk was considered entertaining. As suggested above, this finding too could be spurious, but it does seem intuitively sensible that the Gospel presentation itself would contribute to commitment decisions, particularly if it is intellectually curious teens most likely to make commitment decisions.

The Standard Model then does not appear to equally readily affect any and all teens, but interacts with additional factors of the camp to be most effective with particular types of teens. For Young Life and other youth ministries these findings could be regarded as a welcome caution. The caution is against assuming that a 'magic bullet' Gospel presentation program will reach any and all teens with equal effectiveness. The positive side is that a single model for conveying the Gospel might be effective with different teens in different settings. Hence, rather than standardizing outreach camping so that every camp looks like every other camp, ministries such as Young Life might consider how to marry demonstratively effective Gospel presentation methods with different settings to attract and reach different types of teens. Perhaps many teens will respond well to typical Young Life camping experiences at high-end youth resorts with lots of activities, great food, and comfortable dormitories, but other teens will respond to service camps or other styles of camping. Of course, much more research is needed to identify just which features of outreach camping experiences make lasting impacts on teens of different personality types, nationalities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and so on.

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NOTES

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³ In Young Life jargon, a 'leader' in the camp context is roughly equivalent to a 'camp counselor' with a key difference often being that Young Life leaders (ideally) are known by the campers before coming to camp and will continue relationships with the teens in their care after camp. That is, leaders are not merely assigned to a group of kids for the camp week.

⁴ A total of 153 teens completed either the pre-camp or the after-camp survey but only 140 completed both and are included in the full analyses.

⁵ Unfortunately, the survey only measured country of residence and not nation of citizenship.

⁶ Emmons, R.A. (1999). *The psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality*. New York: The Guilford Press.

⁷ Battista, J., & Almond, R. (1973). *The development of meaning in life*. *Psychiatry*, 36, 409-427.

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⁹ Seidlitz, L., Abernethy, A.D., Duberstein, P.R., Evinger, J.S., Chang, T.H., & Lewis, B.L. (2002). Development of the spiritual transcendence index. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 41, 439-453.

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¹¹ Conrad, D. and Hedin, D. (1981). *Instruments and scoring guide of the experiential education evaluation project*. Center for Youth Development and Research. University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN.

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¹³ McCullough, M.E., Emmons, R.A., Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 82, 112-127.

¹⁴ Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.E., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.

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¹⁷ Schnitker, S.A., & Emmons, R.A. (2007). Patience as a virtue: Religious and psychological perspectives. *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 18, 177-207.

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²¹ Five independent sample T-tests (corrected for multiple tests using a Bonferroni method), one for each personality trait, were conducted to determine if the samples had significantly different personality compositions, but no significant differences were detected.

²² Exact phrasing of these questions on the surveys read: “Did you make a decision to commit your life to God for the *first time* at camp?” or “Did you make a decision to re-commit your life to God at camp?”

²³ Strivings questions and ratings were not included in these analyses but saved for a separate analysis and are not considered here.

²⁴ Wyldlife is Young Life ministry and camping for junior high or middle school students.

²⁵ The exact question on the survey read “Were the talks entertaining?” Participants chose between “extremely,” “moderately,” “not really,” and “definitely not”. As these were scored with ascending values 1-4, respectively, a low score indicated that the talks were regarded as highly entertaining.

²⁶ Thorough details of teens’ socioeconomic backgrounds were not ascertained through survey and so comparisons must be tentative. Young Life staff in the participating regions, however, characterized the bulk of teens as white, middle- to upper-middle-class children of American professionals.