

EMOTIONAL ENERGY CHARGING STATIONS: AN APPLICATION AND EXTENSION
OF RANDALL COLLINS' INTERACTION RITUAL THEORY

by

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Abstract

This study employs and extends Randall Collins' (2004) "Interaction Ritual Theory" (IRT) to analyze and explain the unique, intensely emotional, and profoundly meaningful social processes at a summer camp for incoming college students. Through semi-structured interviews with camp facilitators and analysis of camp training material and advertisements, this project explores the role of "emotional energy" (EE) throughout camp (a unique setting to which IRT has not been applied, and in which group members began the interaction ritual process as strangers). This study identifies five characteristics of specific interaction ritual chains, which I collectively term, an "emotional energy charging station" through which social actors "charge" themselves with emotional energy. The emotional energy charging station fosters increased confidence and initiative in general social interaction for a short period at the end of, and immediately following camp. This study contributes to our understanding of how emotional energy influences individual behavior in more nuanced ways than previously thought.

Key words: emotional energy, interaction rituals, summer camp

**Emotional Energy Charging Stations: An Application and Extension of Randall Collins’
Interaction Ritual Theory**

In high school I attended a three day summer camp that concluded with an activity called “Magic Notes” through which campers wrote letters to each other describing how they had been impacted by one another during the three day camp. I still have the letters my peers wrote to me, and they clearly suggest the presence of intense, emotional bonds I once had with my fellow campers on the final day of that camp. Now, four years later, I don’t recognize most of the names, but I still remember how elated I felt writing and receiving those letters.

My energized state didn’t last long, but it did influence my behavior for a short while after camp. I revisited that camp three times, and each time was able to have a similar experience of increased confidence in interactions that then faded in the days after camp. Examining summer camp literature, one can see that summer camps provide a wealth of social benefits to campers. However, the literature fails to examine *how* those benefits are obtained. In order to explain this, I have employed Randall Collins’ interaction ritual theory (IRT). I speculate that the impacts of summer camps can be understood through one key concept from IRT: emotional energy.

In this article, I employ Collins’ theory to explain the events at a summer camp called Camp WildCat as they are described by 12 facilitators in semi-structured interviews. Through this application, I will contribute to interaction ritual theory by conceptualizing “emotional energy charging stations” as a unique kind of social situation that has a notable impact on campers’ as it relates to Collins’ emotional energy (EE).

Before I apply IRT to Camp WildCat, and develop my definition of EE charging stations, I present literature relating to the benefits of summer camps which I later prove are all connected

to emotional energy. I then present the tenets of IRT and define emotional energy, and discuss my research methods as appropriate for both the context of this research and theoretical orientation.

Literature Review

Summer Camps

There are relatively few sociological discussions of summer camps. The bulk of camp research is in fields related to child development and nursing (Baumann, 2015; Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, & Thurber, 2007; Loveland, Gibson, Lounsbury, & Huffstetler, 2005; Schelbe, Deichen Hansen, France, Rony, & Twichell, 2018). Regardless of the discipline, summer camp literature almost always unveils some sort of positive social benefit or benefits camps provide campers such as strengthened social competencies and self esteem (Dworken 2001; Henderson et al. 2007; Schelbe et al. 2018).

In “Summer Camp Experiences: Parental Perceptions of Youth Development Outcomes,” Henderson et al (2007) assessed if and how a population of 2,300 parents perceived changes in their children following their participation in a summer camp. In general, the parents noticed a wide array of positive changes for which Henderson et al (2007) developed comprehensive categories. Of those, the most relevant categories for this discussion are self confidence, self esteem, social comfort, and peer relationships (Henderson et al 2007:990). Henderson et al (2007) concluded that “camps are making discernable differences in the lives of many campers and parents notice these changes” (1005).

Perhaps the most relevant previous study comes from Dennis D. Waskul (1998) as he discussed the role of the camp counselor and the creation of an isolated camp world. Waskul followed a team of young adults who gave up their summers to take on the role of camp

counselor (a role which, Waskul argues, lacks rigid expectations one may encounter in other positions and thus is shaped within the isolated world of a given camp) (Waskul 1998:34). In his discussion about creating camp culture, Waskul noted that the campers involved in his study developed a “camp culture” which in turn shaped patterns of interaction dynamics at camp (Waskul 1998:50). He thus inferred that relationships between campers, and/or between campers and facilitators (and even facilitator to facilitator) contributed to creating camp culture. Waskul then discussed the friendships which formed between facilitators as they interacted daily and quickly developed a rich shared history. Waskul did not include campers in that discussion, even though some interview excerpts he cited in his publication mention the importance of campers becoming friends with each other.

A final previous study to note is “Does camp make a difference?: Camp counselors' perceptions of how camp impacted youth” by Schelbe et al. (2018). Through interviews with eleven camp counselors regarding their perceptions of how a week-long camp impacted youth, Schelbe et al. identified three avenues through which camp counselors perceived positive youth development: relationships youth formed, the camp being a “safe space,” and the camp’s setting on a college campus. In this case, the relationships at camp were understood as beneficial in and of themselves rather than one part of a more complex process which leads to social benefits (Schelbe et al. 2018:443).

Additionally, there is a notable body of research about the benefits of specialized summer camps created for certain groups. The foci of these studies include camps for disadvantaged children (Baumann 2015), bereaved children (Farber & Sabatino 2007), or camps with predominantly white middle-class children (Henderson et al. 2007).

It is clear that most studies about summer camps are essentially snapshots of before and after camp, as they chronicle what changes one can observe pre and post camp. This study can be thought of as the gap between the two snapshots. It is an explanation of how groups develop at summer camps which will then inform *why* they are able to provide the services that they do.

Interaction Ritual Theory

This study draws on Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory (IRT) to explain the emotional and intense series of interactions facilitators observed at Camp WildCat. IRT is a "theory of situations... momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters" (Collins 2004:3). This emphasis on situations is critical to IRT, through which situations are seen as a "process by which shared emotions and intersubjective focus sweep individuals along by flooding their consciousness" (Collins 2004:4). From this perspective, these "situations" are rituals, and Collins (2004) proposed that people go through life in a series of them. In viewing situations as rituals, rituals can be understood as moments of shared emotion and focus which produce momentary shared realities between participants. This broad understanding of rituals includes virtually every imaginable social encounter from "Hi, how are you?" exchanges to job interviews.

Collins (2004) refers to these "situations as rituals" as interaction rituals, and in order to occur they require four "ingredients" which consequently reap four outcomes. The ingredients are bodily copresence (people must be together), barriers to outsiders (there must parameters of group belonging), mutual focus of attention, and shared mood. The ways in which rituals obtain these four ingredients is the basis by which Collins' categorized rituals as either "natural" or "formal." Natural rituals "build up mutual focus and emotional entrainment without formally

stereotyped procedures” (Collins 2004:50). Formal rituals, in contrast, are “those that are initiated by a commonly recognized apparatus of ceremonial procedures” (Collins 2004:50). In other words, natural rituals are generally unplanned as the mutual focus and emotional entrainment are developed as a result of circumstance. For example, a group interacting because they happened to be on the same delayed flight is a natural ritual. An example of a formal ritual is a church service in which there is a shared understanding of the series of events.

Regardless of a ritual’s categorical assignment, the four outcomes of a successful ritual remain the same. They are group solidarity, emotional energy in the individuals involved in the ritual, symbols of social relationships, and standards of morality (Collins 2004:48).

Emotional Energy

The ritual outcome of emotional energy is my primary focus and it plays a unique role in IRT because IRT assumes that “Emotional energy is what individuals seek; situations are attractive or unattractive to them to the extent that the interaction ritual is successful in providing emotional energy” (Collins 2004:44). Collins (2004) even goes so far as to regard humans as “emotional energy junkies,” implicitly making a claim to the role of emotion as a central part of human nature.

Understanding emotional energy requires a specific definition of emotions. In IRT, emotions are both ingredients *and* outcomes of interaction. Collins (2004) characterization of emotional energy involves a “broader” understanding of emotion which includes “short and dramatic” emotions (such as fear, joy, and anger) as well as “long term enduring” emotions (long term feelings of mundanity or feeling “good”). Cottingham (2012), citing Collins, described emotions as “symbolically reproduced outcomes of interaction” meaning that “emotions serve as

the social mechanisms underlying societal cohesion” (Cottingham 2012:170). Mutual emotion, or as Collins calls it, “shared mood” is critical to the success of interaction rituals.

With this understanding of emotion in mind, one can begin to understand the concept of emotional energy. To reiterate, emotional energy is gained through participation in rituals (Collins 2004). In these rituals of interaction, individuals must expend emotional energy in order to gain it. Interaction rituals can be deemed successful or unsuccessful based on whether or not individuals gain emotional energy through said interaction rituals.

Emotional energy can be observed as feelings of confidence, and courage to take action (Collins 2004). Emotional energy is connected to an individual’s “drive” or initiative. Therefore, as individuals gain emotional energy, they should demonstrate increased drive and willingness to take action. This, paired with one of the other three consequences of successful interaction rituals, standards of morality, explains behavior at Camp WildCat. For after conducting a chain of successful interaction rituals with a certain group, individuals are likely to demonstrate increased allegiance to the group’s expectations, rules, and norms. These are the “standards of morality” of which Collins spoke. One moral standard for group members at Camp WildCat is a norm of participation. Campers are expected to be fully engaged and present during discussions and activities. Therefore, as the campers gained emotional energy with their small group, they demonstrated increased willingness to take action in line with the group’s values by participating more enthusiastically in the group activities. Virtually every participant in this study observed such changes in their campers over the course of Camp WildCat.

Emotional energy does not exist separately from physical energy, as it provides the necessary motivation to “jump for joy” (Collins 2004) or relates to the exhaustion that accompanies depressive emotional states. This physical energy manifested itself at Camp

WildCat through the camp's traditional "dance parties" during which campers' participation and enthusiasm increased as camp progressed-- a direct reflection of increased emotional energy.

In successful interaction ritual chains, emotional energy peaks during the most intense moments of ritual. In the case of this study, this crescendo took place during a new Camp WildCat activity called "Perspectives" which was mentioned, unprompted, by 11 of 12 interviewees. I will articulate the substantial evidence that Perspectives was the peak of the Camp WildCat ritual chain in my findings. For now, it is important to note that Collins claimed that intense points of interaction rituals belong on the highlight reels of a person's life. They are the best moments of the life course. The awe-struck manner in which facilitators discussed Perspectives reflects this sentiment from Collins, further suggesting that Perspectives is a moment of *intense* ritual that super-charges participants with emotional energy.

Applying Interaction Ritual Theory

Scholars have applied IRT to explain a wide array of social experiences including sex (Collins 2004), tobacco use (Collins 2004), organizational culture in Australian public service (Matheson 2019), a "student volunteer army" responding to crises (Lewis 2013), religious participation (Wollschleger 2012), social media use of sorority members (Beaver 2016), and even sacred harp singing (Heider and Warner 2010), among others.

This project serves as yet another application of IRT, this time to a summer camp. In addition, in this paper I extend and refine Collins' concept of emotional energy by demonstrating how emotional energy can manifest itself in intense displays of emotion rather than just long term enduring feelings of belonging to a group as Collins believed. I will call situations in which emotional energy functions in this way "emotional energy charging stations" and summer camps are an example.

Furthermore, the accounts facilitators provided in this study suggest that the need for formal facilitation decreased as the individual emotional energy levels of campers increased. In response to this, I include a brief discussion addressing Collins' conceptualization of "formal" and "natural" rituals, and how the two may not be as opposed as they appear in Collins' arguments. Summer camps, and other emotional energy charging stations, walk the line between formal and natural rituals, and also must actively avoid being perceived as "forced rituals."

All of my contributions center around my primary argument that summer camps are emotional energy charging stations in which, through a complex chain of rituals, campers and facilitators are super charged with emotional energy that then fades nearly as quickly as it charged. The question, then, is why do summer camps super charge those involved with emotional energy, and why does said emotional energy manifest itself differently than Collins' anticipated?

Methods

Site Selection

This project focuses on the unique and intensely emotional experience of campers and facilitators at a summer camp. For this exploration, I interviewed facilitators, assessed recruitment literature, and analyzed facilitator training materials from Camp WildCat: a three and a half day summer camp experience for incoming first year and transfer students at Xavier Young University (XYU). Camp WildCat is a point of immense pride for the XYU community through which members of the incoming student body can meet each other and upperclassmen (the facilitators who run the camp) before they begin classes at their new university.

In this study, I focus on the bonding and interaction processes at Camp WildCat which are readily observed in the program's use of the "small group" format. The small group format

ensures that individuals conduct most, if not all, camp activities with the same group of peers rather than with the entire body of campers at large, which can be as many as 200 campers.

Small groups range from 10 to 20 campers. They play games together, discuss college, eat meals together, and so on. During the interviews, I paid special attention to the differences facilitators observed within their small groups between the first and last moments of camp, and how they explained differences in attitude and behavior between individuals at the outset of camp.

While the small group system used by Camp WildCat is most relevant to this research, there are several important other factors. For one, all attendees are incoming students at the same university, and therefore are close together in age. Demographic data of the camps was not collected, but it stands to reason that the demographic makeup is similar to that of the campus at large, where 74% of students are white. Summer camps across the nation demonstrate similar demographic trends (American Camp Association 1997).

There are nearly one dozen different sessions of Camp WildCat every summer as part of XYU's efforts to increase the likelihood that any given incoming student can attend. Camps occur on/near campus, or at various destinations across the US and abroad. All camps on/near campus are free of charge, but the destination camps require fees that campers must pay to participate.

Depending on the camp location, activities may vary. For example, one camp may go on a hike, while another may visit the zoo. Despite these differences, individual Camp WildCat sections differ from each other no more than other summer camps may. If one were to randomly select two summer camps across America, they could vary by age of attendees, gender division, duration of camp, number of attendees, location (college campuses or outdoor spaces are among the most common), and purpose (leadership, sports, faith, etc.) In other words, there is no

“average” camp experience that can be generalized to all summer camps. However, at Camp WildCat there are certain activities, the “facilitations,” that are conducted across all camps. These activities are typically games followed by structured discussions. According to facilitators, these facilitations change as camp goes on and come to require more and more “vulnerability” as the camp progresses. It is particularly on these activities that exist across all camps that I focus my discussion of the findings.

Data

As discussed in my theoretical discussion, I have employed interaction ritual theory to analyze this camp experience. Camps are a social environment in which IRT has yet to be applied. In addition to this novel environmental application, in this project I refine Randall Collins’ understanding of one of the key concepts in IRT: emotional energy. Additionally, because interactions at summer camps are mediated by counselors, facilitators, and mentors virtually around the clock, applying IRT to summer camps will allow me to further develop Collins’ understanding of the relationship between his conceptualization of “natural” and “formal” rituals.

Through discussing their experiences as facilitators (and as campers in years prior) those involved in this study provided insight into just how deeply emotional it can be to attend a summer camp. All the facilitators involved in this study first attended Camp WildCat as campers, and many have facilitated more than once. Their insight into the experience of campers is certainly well informed. They are also an ideal population to interview while studying emotional energy. When discussing how to study emotional energy, Collins noted “Patterns of emotional energy could be systematically studied by having individuals give reports of their subjective experience various kinds of situations” (Collins 2004). In addition, interviews with facilitators

offer another insightful dimension because they were also able to provide information about the experiences of their campers. This is a slight methodological shift, as to study emotional energy, I am relying not only on subjective accounts of the self, but also subjective accounts of the behavior of others and how said behavior suggests increasing emotional energy throughout camp.

For summer 2019, Camp WildCat selected nearly 200 XYU students to serve as facilitators who accordingly were the only eligible participants for this study. To recruit from that pool, I emailed each facilitator in May 2019 before any of the Camp WildCat sessions for that summer began and asked them to fill out a brief survey indicating interest in participating in the study. In response to this invitation, 12 facilitators expressed interest in being interviewed when fall classes commenced in late August.

A second recruitment email was later sent to facilitators who did not respond to the first email. This recruitment email reaped 12 more responses for a total of 24 potential interviewees. Not all facilitators of those 24 were able to complete an interview as they are all undergraduate students with busy schedules, so a grand total of 12 interviews were collected and analyzed for this study. Data concerning the gender and race and/or ethnicity of interviews was not recorded in order to protect the anonymity of participants given the small community of facilitators.

Participants had several options as concerns interview scheduling and location. Ideally interviews would have taken place immediately following their participation in Camp WildCat, but due to travel arrangements and limited availability on the part of myself and the facilitators, most interviews occurred in the first few weeks of the Fall 2019 semester once all the facilitators had returned to XYU to begin classes.

Interviews occurred on school days during standard business hours (between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm) and in public places including the university library, an on campus coffee shop, and a coffee shop adjacent to campus. These, and other similar locations, were suggested to interviewees and they were asked to select whichever was most convenient for them. Given that these are public spaces frequently used by XYU students, accessibility was assured. Due to the low risk associated with this study, public settings proved to create an informal and personal atmosphere for each interview. Indeed, most facilitators take immense pride in their affiliation with Camp WildCat, and even include it on their resumes.

The actual interviews matched the informality of their locations, they were semi-structured and casual. Because the subject matter is relatively easy to discuss and was generally free of topics that may create discomfort, the interviews felt like a normal conversation between acquaintances. Each interview began with the question “What is your understanding of the purpose of Camp WildCat?” From there, I asked follow-up questions that allowed interviewees to guide conversation in ways that were significant to them. For example, some interviewees were far more concerned with discussing the impacts Camp WildCat has on the XYU community, while others focused on their specific observations at Camp WildCat. The average interview was twelve minutes and eighteen seconds long. Pseudonyms are used in this report to ensure protection of participant’s privacy.

Interviewing facilitators is a fruitful method of data collection to study the experience of small groups at summer camps because the facilitators hold a unique and informed perspective. As mentioned above, in addition to facilitating in summer 2019, every interviewee had attended Camp WildCat as a freshman, and several had facilitated in previous summers, or more than once in summer 2019. Through these experiences, they have been able to observe several

different small groups develop and thus can comment on more general trends in groups at this camp. Also having seen more than one group, they understand how drastically small groups may vary from each other.

Once interviews were completed, I transcribed the recordings as quickly as possible, and analyzed them using an inductive approach. I proceeded to openly code the interview and identified similarities across interviews relating to the bonding processes within small groups, and change in camper interaction over the course of camp. Through selective coding, I organized the major themes from the interviews that pertain to the subject matter of this research-- emotional experiences, vulnerability, and individual affinities to participate in camp.

Positionality

As a prior attendee and facilitator of Camp WildCat, I had access to training material and understanding of the specialized vocabulary used at camp. These roles enabled me to access the interviewees and speak their language about the camp. I was able to understand acronyms they used and events they referenced, and am thus able to elaborate on them in this study. The students I interviewed for this study are my peers, some of whom I have had classes with or gotten to know through extracurricular activities. That being said, I do not hold any leadership positions in any capacity over my fellow students involved in this study that could have inappropriately influenced individuals to participate. Indeed, some of the interviewees run clubs and events that I regularly attend, so they have a vague sense of authority over me in those contexts. This never came to mind while I was recruiting, interviewing, or interpreting data. My status is for all intents and purposes equal to that of the participants in the campus community.

Any pre-existing relationships I had with interviewees are almost entirely within the academic context with little to no interaction outside of education. So, seeing my name signed at

the bottom of my recruitment emails for this study may have slightly influenced whether or not they initially displayed interest in participating because we already have rapport. I regard this as a strength because it made participants with whom I share rapport appear candid and at ease during the interview.

With our mutual identity as facilitators and students, as well as the casual setting and nature of the interviews, rapport and comfort were easy to achieve. I did not notice any discomfort on the part of the interviewees. Indeed, I frequently was able to laugh and joke with interviewees about the exhausting Camp WildCat experience.

Findings

Two Snapshots

“Complete strangers go from totally not knowing anyone, not willing to share personal things, to like, a new family that they’ve created in the matter of two or three days.” -Facilitator Cane

To begin my findings, I present the major differences facilitators observed in their campers between the first day of camp and the third/final day to develop two “snapshots” of Camp WildCat small groups, pre-camp and post-camp. These snapshots provide a sense of direction for the subsequent sections and outline evidence from the findings that suggest campers’ emotional energy drastically increases following participation in Camp WildCat.

In each interview, I asked what changes the facilitator observed within their small group between day one and day three. From their responses to this question and other related comments throughout their interviews, I developed nine general categories of changes that can be correlated to ingredients and outcomes of successful rituals as discussed in my theoretical discussion.

Language in quotations are exact quotes from interviewees.

Figure 1: Change Over Time

Interviewee	Beginning of Camp	End of Camp	Kind of Change
Karen	Campers were not interacting with each other "at all"	<p>Conversation flowed without intervention by the facilitators.</p> <p>Campers voluntarily disclosing sensitive information about themselves and "affirming" one another following said disclosure.</p> <p>Campers demonstrated vulnerability.</p>	<p>Ease of discussion</p> <p>Depth of discussion</p> <p>Vulnerability</p>
Kay	Lots of silence.	<p>Silence is "just not there"</p> <p>Campers have made friends with each other</p> <p>Campers are more comfortable sharing about themselves.</p> <p>Campers were more "together"</p> <p>Campers themselves guided discussion</p>	<p>Ease of discussion</p> <p>Friendship</p> <p>Self-disclosure</p> <p>Group membership</p> <p>Ease of discussion</p>
Andy	<p>Campers are "awkward strangers"</p> <p>There is "dead silence" during facilitated discussions.</p>	<p>Campers are "friendly acquaintances."</p> <p>Campers are slightly more willing to talk</p> <p>Campers use their cell phones less frequently.</p> <p>Campers would make jokes with each other.</p>	<p>Friendship</p> <p>Ease of discussion</p> <p>Mutual focus</p> <p>Emotion</p>
Jane	There was some awkward silence, but not for an "obscene" amount of time	Campers asked each other follow-up questions and facilitators did not intervene.	Ease of discussion

	Campers shared information that was “surface level”	Campers weren’t afraid to “go deeper” and were “sharing a lot more” than the interviewee expected. Campers enter college “feeling more confident”	Depth of discussion Emotion
Taylor	Campers are hesitant to share about themselves “It’s just awkward.” Disinterest in other group members.	Increased comfort to “come forward and... share.” Knowledge of group members “More intentional listening”	Ease of discussion Self-disclosure Mutual focus
Sandy	“Campers are nervous to meet each other.” Some campers were initially “inclusive and outgoing” while others were “really quiet and never spoke.” Few campers participate in “dance parties”	Campers alleviate this fear as they disclose personal things about themselves Each individual in the group demonstrated increased interest in participating and willingness to “open up” Nearly all campers participate in “dance parties”	Self disclosure Depth of discussion Ease of discussion Mutual focus
Alexander	The group was irregularly enthusiastic and the anticipated “awkward silences” were rare. However, it was a few individuals who filled more silence	Members participated more equally in group activities and discussion. “Every single person participated.” “More obvious unity within the group” Campers enjoyed the week.	Mutual focus Mutual focus Solidarity Emotion

Leo	Did not speak much to observations at the beginning of camp	Increased “buy in” to the objectives of camp. Intense levels of self disclosure	Mutual focus Self disclosure
Jay	“Everybody was obviously awkward.” Campers were “judging each other” Campers are strangers	Campers were “leaning on each other” Campers demonstrated “mutual respect” for one another Campers know each other’s “deep stories.” Campers enter school on a “Camp WildCat high”	Solidarity Emotional entrainment Depth of disclosure Emotion
Amy	Campers were “nice” to each other, but seem disinterested in becoming friends. Campers waiting for the facilitators to engage them in discussion	Campers appear to be friends and display desire to converse with one another Campers would continue to converse after facilitated activities ended.	Ease of discussion Mutual focus Ease of discussion
Cane	Camp activities are “generic” at first Campers are complete strangers	As camp progresses, the activities and subsequent discussions grow more serious and afterwards campers demonstrate more “bondedness” Campers are “best friends and “a new family”	Solidarity Friendship
Sally	Day one is “always very awkward” “No one’s really talking.”	“People participate a lot more towards the end”	Ease of discussion

Of the nine categories of change I identified, “ease of discussion” and “mutual focus” were mentioned most frequently. Collins’ (2004) claimed that whether or not students participated in classroom discussion depends more on the flowing of emotional energy within the classroom more than students “lacking in symbolic capital, in things to talk about” (72). An organic and constant flow of discussion is a matter of emotional energy, rather than a product of lack of things to say. Facilitators observed increased tempo and flow of conversations in their small group. I suggest that this is because by the end of camp, campers have increased initiative and confidence to participate due to higher EE.

In addition to ease of discussion, mutual focus grew more intense between day one and day three. Collins (2004) suggested that

[Mutual focus] is what makes the difference between situations in which emotional contagion and all the other aspects of rhythmic entrainment build up to high levels, and those in which they reach only low levels and fail completely. (48)

Mutual focus is induced through the facilitated activities at camp, and interacts with emotional energy in a feedback loop. As the small group mutually focuses on activities, they increase the likelihood of intense and successful interaction rituals which then result in emotional energy. Said emotional energy gains then cause campers to grow *even more* engaged in discussion and interaction. They grow more focused, which leads to increased potential for *more* intense rituals, and so on.

The differences between the first and last days of camp clearly suggest that an intense interaction ritual chain transpired and charged attendees with emotional energy. For this reason, Camp WildCat is an example of what I call “emotional energy charging stations.” Through my

discussion of the ritual processes at Camp WildCat, I present five principles of EE charging stations that explain what they are and how they function. EE charging stations:

1. Are universal. They are capable of affecting the emotional energy levels of everyone involved regardless of their place on the EE continuum.
2. Rely on formal rituals that permit and encourage natural rituals to occur.
3. Build EE through interaction rituals that gradually and systematically increase in intensity.
4. Abstain from forced rituals.
5. Have an end.

Each of the following sections corresponds with one of the five characteristics of EE charging stations.

EE Charging Stations are Universal: The First Facilitation

“You are laying the groundwork and tone for the rest of camp and for your small group!” -Camp WildCat manual.

The aforementioned importance of mutual focus for successfully building emotional energy is a key reason why so many facilitators stressed the importance of the first small group meeting as a time to establish expectations and attitudes. Indeed, the first activity at Camp WildCat involves literally writing small group expectations on a bandana which is then openly displayed during any subsequent small group functions. This act of creating the bandana, and the continuous presence of the bandana, creates a point of mutual focus the instant Camp WildCat begins. The additional ingredients for an IR chain are identifiably present as well. Bodily co-presence is a key characteristic of the first small group meeting; this is reinforced on a physical level as all group members sit together in a circle at the first meeting (group gatherings

always assume a circle formation at Camp WildCat), serving as a barrier to outsiders. The campers are in the group, and anyone outside the circle, is not.

While bodily co-presence, mutual focus, and barriers to outsiders are instantaneously established during the first small group meeting, the fourth ingredient for interaction rituals, shared mood, is more complicated to manufacture. Over half of the interviewees in this study remarked how individuals have different “starting places” (a common phrase) when it came to “buying in” (another common one) to the group. Campers enter the small group in different emotional states that may encourage or inhibit the kind of shared mood that permits successful interaction rituals.

As stated by Alexander, “In terms of, like, starting points for groups-- I think it’s very dependent on how freshmen are ready to go to college.” Sentiments such as this demonstrate facilitators’ observations that some campers displayed far more initial enthusiasm and willingness to participate in the small group than others. It appears that at Camp WildCat, a unified shared mood sometimes took more time to produce than the other ingredients for interaction rituals outlined by Collins (2004). In theory, shared mood is induced through mutual focus as one is aware of others mutually focusing around them.

Even though shared mood is a consequence of prolonged mutual focus, a quarter of facilitators remarked how privileged they felt that their group seemed to share a mood of enthusiasm and friendliness beginning at the first small group meeting. As Jane put it, her small group entered camp with “walls already down.” This contrasts Amy, who remarked that her group began “not super wanting to make friends... they just sat there silently waiting for us [the facilitators] to get started.” Despite this difficult first session, Amy continued that by the end of camp “even if my [co-facilitator] wasn’t there, they’d still all be talking.”

Facilitators were clearly aware of, and okay with, the reality that every group is different at the beginning of camp in regard to ease of discussion and emotional entrainment. They seemed to understand these differences in terms of what I call the “camp powers” of the individual campers that composed their small group. Camp powers essentially reflect how “good” of a camper an individual is. Do they readily participate in discussion and activities? Do they lead the group during games and free time? If so, they have high camp powers. Campers with superb camp powers frequently speak, actively participate in games and activities, attend “dance parties,” and are generally outgoing. Campers lacking camp powers are “off to the sides” (a spatial metaphor used by several facilitators) and are less enthusiastic about participating in camp. As these definitions suggest, characteristics of high or low camp powers are virtually synonymous with the characteristics of high or low emotional energy. In other words, facilitators assessed campers in terms of their emotional energy to inform how they conducted themselves as leaders at Camp WildCat.

These camp powers, then, are the primary determinant of the initial emotional unity of any given small group. As Alexander put it, a group's initial unity is “basically luck of like [who] you get.” This shared feeling of “luck of the draw” reflects a belief amongst some facilitators that different campers possess varying degrees of camp powers.

This, again, relates to Collins’ assessment of the importance of sufficient emotional energy flow in the classroom, as students likely possess the requisite symbolic stock but lack the emotional energy to speak up. Camp is the same way. I speculate that the campers perceived as possessing camp powers who were often referred to as “extroverts” or labelled “outgoing” at the time of camp possess a relatively high level of emotional energy. On the flip side the “introverts”

possessed low camp powers and reflect Collins' characteristics of low emotional energy individuals.

These observed differences could be attributed to many factors such as whether or not an individual has attended a summer camp before, whether English is their first language, and so on. Additionally, while race and ethnicity were mentioned in only two interviews, other subtle allusions to race and ethnicity suggest racial and ethnic identity perhaps influence one's demonstration of camp powers.

Regardless, this perceived existence of "introverts" and "extroverts" greatly informed the behavior and experiences of most facilitators in this study as they made conscious efforts to engage individuals they perceived as introverted in camp functions. They thus began to tend toward "forced rituals." The facilitators seemed very much aware of this, and took efforts to avoid the use of force. The low EE/camp power introverts were viewed as in need of encouragement, but not *too* much encouragement. Camp WildCat facilitators are proponents of "challenge by choice."

"Challenge by choice" is the idea that campers should be encouraged, but not forced, to push themselves out of their "comfort zones" at camp. So, during group discussions, facilitators will encourage, but not mandate every camper to participate. This abstinence from the use of force is critical to the success of Camp WildCat as an emotional energy charging station.

So, introverts and extroverts at camp were understood in terms of an individual's demonstration of camp powers which reflect their emotional energy charge at the beginning of camp. However, regardless of one's camp powers, facilitators observed EE changes within all campers. This highlights the first characteristic of emotional energy charging stations: they are universal. This means that EE charging stations are likely to have a positive charging effect on

everyone involved, regardless of participant's initial EE levels. In order to be universal, charging stations must inherently provide, or quickly produce, the four essential ingredients of interaction rituals which again are bodily co-presence, mutual focus, shared mood, and barriers to outsiders. Shared mood is the only factor left to chance, as it depends on the initial EE levels of participants, but if a situation is a true EE charging station, it will quickly induce shared mood through mutual focus.

The Growth of Natural Rituals

In this section, I explore the gradual process of charging EE over the three days of Camp WildCat that provided individuals with the necessary amount of EE and solidarity to successfully conduct the most intense camp ritual: Perspectives. The fundamental principle here is as campers are charged with EE, they are more likely to whole-heartedly engage in opportunities to gain *more* EE at Camp WildCat. This is exemplified through natural rituals that emerge in the small moments between all of the facilitated/formal rituals at Camp WildCat.

While most facilitators made comments on both the first small group session and Perspectives as the culminating activity, there was some variation in what other camp activities facilitators chose to discuss. The days at Camp WildCat are structured around a series of pre-organized activities or "facilitations," each of which is designed to achieve a certain goal. According to the facilitator handbook, the first two activities are intended to "spark conversation" between small group members and then to "allow students to find common bonds at the beginning of camp." This suggests that Camp WildCat facilitations are formal interaction rituals as they are specifically intended to serve as conduits to the effects of interaction rituals, namely solidarity. In addition to any stated social objectives, all activities at Camp WildCat in

one way or another address common questions or concerns that incoming college students may share.

The first two facilitations mentioned above involve general introductions (name, major, hometown, etc) which potentially provide content for later conversation. This content is what Collins (2004) called “dramatic material” and it refers to the stock of information and experiences that individuals can use in a conversation ritual. The greater the stock of dramatic material, the greater the likelihood of success in said rituals (most likely in the form of increased solidarity and emotional energy). In other words, as camp progresses, campers develop more extensive knowledge of each other *and* create a shared past of unique experiences. Campers can draw from both these resources of dramatic material which grow more robust with time and increase the likelihood of small conversational rituals succeeding.

Facilitations are formal rituals because they use a structured curriculum to induce Collins’ (2004) four interaction ritual ingredients. Through formal rituals or “facilitations” at camp, campers develop substantial dramatic material. Development of said material seems to increase occurrences of natural-conversation rituals which transpire in-between formal rituals as campers interact en route to the next formal ritual, at meal times, and during the little free time built into the camp schedule. Many facilitators observed increased frequency and intensity of these natural-conversation rituals over time. According to facilitator Karen, campers would often begin these natural rituals by referring to discussion content from previous formal/facilitation rituals.

[The campers] just started like affirming each other on their own without [the facilitators] having to do that. Like they looked at each other like... ‘That thing that you went through is really hard and I’m just proud of you like for still being here and still standing.’

The emergence of inside jokes is a perfect example of drawing upon formal rituals for dramatic material and natural-conversation rituals. Facilitator Jane observed campers develop inside jokes following an activity called “Markers,” during which campers are given a task that is intentionally designed to end in failure. Likewise, facilitator Andy alluded to inside jokes when discussing how his group interacted during free time on the second day of camp. Andy observed his campers “just talking, they would come together and start talking and hanging out in like uh (laughs) being dumb but like in the best way possible.” Andy attributed this to campers’ ability to “engage in commonalities.”

There are virtually no breaks from the IR chain at Camp WildCat, which would be exhausting if the rituals were failures. More often than not, the formal rituals have policies, procedures, and trained facilitators to ensure an EE rush follows each and every activity, and as the formal rituals progress, so do the chances of successful natural-conversational rituals. And so, the two ritual types, formal and natural, work in tandem to shape the camper experience at Camp WildCat. This dynamic at Camp WildCat in which natural rituals *grow out* of the formal rituals through using them as symbolic stock is the second characteristic of EE charging stations.

Charging as a Gradual and Systematic Process

The facilitation “Markers” came up in seven interviews, and was the second most mentioned camp activity just behind Perspectives. Markers occurs the evening of the first day of camp. Before Markers, the small group has engaged in a total of five facilitated rituals, and spent nearly six hours together. Markers begins with a game and then leads into a discussion about the labels people place on each other. The game requires a moderate amount of self-disclosure, more than any prior activity. It requests that campers disclose one label or quality that they believe others unfairly assign to them, address it as false, and replace it with a positive characteristic or

describing word. While Perspectives appears to be the favorite activity of most facilitators, Markers was perceived as a benchmark in the interaction ritual process.

According to facilitators, Markers is an activity that must be earned and is the product of all previous interactions. As Amy remarked:

You gotta build it up in every conversation up to that point, uhm, because if you haven't built that up by the time you get to Markers- it's not- people aren't gonna wanna go that deep and they're gonna share more shallow things.

Markers requires campers to have an adequate EE stock to have the confidence and dedication to group values to participate at the level of depth facilitators desire. Three facilitators noted that Markers was the first instance at Camp WildCat in which they asked campers to discuss subjects deeper than one would with strangers.

The Markers game that proceeds the discussion on labels is intended to frustrate campers. As facilitator Jane put it:

They kinda like bonded over like frustration which sounds bad, but... They were SO mad, but like they were all mad *together* so like, in like the appropriate way--but uhm--where it's like joking around together and that kind of- like created inside jokes for them and so um, but then like moved into serious facilitations and uhm were sharing a lot more than I probably ever thought that would happen. [emphasis added]

The game sets the stage for a group to conduct an interaction ritual by establishing mutual focus and developing shared mood through playful frustration. Jane notes that the campers were all mad but they were mad "together." The key factor in facilitating group bonding for Markers is the same as the first facilitation: individual emotional energy. Have campers charged up enough to participate in Markers the way they are expected to?

The seven facilitators who mentioned Markers all did so to point out their appreciation of the activity for encouraging campers to “open up.” Regarding EE levels, Markers can be considered the half-way-point to Perspectives. It indicates if the interaction rituals thus far in the group have reaped the intended benefits. If Markers is successful, the group should leave the facilitation with the highest EE yet, and indeed, most facilitators who spoke about Markers seemed to view it as a success, which couldn’t have been achieved any earlier in the camp. By the time Markers occurs, campers are “pretty together,” remarked facilitator Kay, adding that:

... People are willing to respect each other and have usually made friends with other people in the group at this point so they’re more comfortable sharing those things.

To a similar end, facilitator Taylor shared that Markers was the first time their group got “a little more serious.” Taylor went on to say that Markers was the most “transformative exercise” for their group.

As facilitators emphasized, Markers must be earned and cannot happen any earlier than it does in the Camp WildCat itinerary because in emotional energy charging stations, EE is built through encounters of increasing intensity. Individuals cannot be charged to the same degree by simply being thrown into an intense ritual. This gradual and intentional progression of intensity is the third characteristic of EE charging stations.

_____Markers isn’t the only indication of gradually increasing ritual intensity at Camp WildCat. The beloved camp tradition of “dance parties” serve as another example of ever-increasing ritual intensity and EE levels. Dance parties occur throughout the entirety of camp. Over the years, facilitators have developed a stock of popular songs for which they have developed simple choreography to teach campers. Dance parties happen spontaneously

throughout camp, and also consistently at the end of each camp day. The dances can last anywhere from five minutes to two hours if the day wraps up early enough.

The presence of dance parties at Camp WildCat has three implications. First, according to Collins, “Dancing is a bodily symbol, an enactment of a degree of membership... bodily enacted symbols, directly performing membership with the persons danced with” (Collins 2004:154). Dancing is a direct performance of membership to a group, and therefore, if performed successfully, should impact emotional energy. Dance parties serve as yet another avenue at Camp WildCat for individuals to charge themselves with emotional energy. There is a high degree of bodily copresence (sharing the dance floor), mutual focus (the choreography), shared mood (the energized emotional state often induced through dancing), and barriers to outsiders (through the existence of choreography).

The second implication relates to the traditional choreography that has spanned camp generations. Because the choreography must be learned, it functions as an additional barrier to outsiders and as symbolic stock. Group members know the choreography, and outsiders do not. All campers are strongly encouraged to learn and participate in the dances, and facilitators demonstrated disappointment with campers who did not participate.

Third, since dance parties occur throughout all of camp, they (along with Markers) demonstrate the gradual emotional energy charge that occurs at camp. As Collins (2004) states of emotional energy, “EE gives energy, not just for physical activity (such as the demonstrative outbursts at moments of acute joy), but above all for taking initiative in social action” (107). Dancing requires physical energy for the movements, and cognitive energy to learn the choreography. Therefore, as individuals EE increases, so should their investment in the dance

parties. Furthermore, dancing in space is a somewhat vulnerable act, and requires initiative in social action that is characteristic of high EE.

Facilitators observed differences in the dance parties as camp progressed that suggest EE levels rose steadily throughout camp. As Sandy put it,

I think it's the first night that they're there, you have like a dance party and its kinda just all the facilitators no one's really, you know, maybe the few like really outgoing freshmen or like, incoming students are dancing too, but like, by the end, everybody is dancing and everyone knows the-- You know like the same dances like everyone follows along.

Sandy observed not only more students participating in the dances, but increased understanding of the traditional choreography. Increased participation in the dances suggests a rise in EE levels, and the increased understanding of the choreography demonstrates strengthened dedication to group rules and symbols.

Like Sandy, many facilitators ascribed whether or not campers chose to participate in dance parties to individual camper's camp powers. Those with intensely "extroverted" personalities were the most likely to participate.

I've met campers who are extroverted and going so hard at the dance parties which is super great but also like the introverted ones that just stick together and they make some like lifelong connections that way.

In this quote, Cane demonstrates both the emergence of natural rituals around formal rituals, and the ascription of individual behavior to introverted/extrovertedness AKA camp powers. This is congruous with the other characteristics facilitators endowed upon campers with high camp

powers because again, regardless of the starting point, there was an observable change in participation in line with the changes one would expect to follow and EE charge.

In general, facilitators used the participation in dances during Camp WildCat to calibrate the level of group bonding at the camp. As facilitator Leo remarked, “I think my group had a good time, I saw a lot of people dancing at the dance parties, I saw a lot of people smiling consistently throughout.”

Facilitators also observed increased dedication to Camp WildCat functions following participation in dance parties. Facilitator Taylor noted “One of my [campers] went to the dance thing! The dance party, and that was, like, he just like, had a good time and so he started participating.” Thus, the high levels of emotional energy exhibited during the dance parties created new avenues of participation in the group. Dance parties and Markers embody the gradual and intentional buildup of EE and increase of ritual intensity at Camp WildCat.

Obstinance from Force: “Challenge by Choice”

In activities like dance parties and Markers, the task of the facilitator is to encourage participation, but not *force* it. Collins (2004), stated that forced rituals “occur when individuals are forced to put on a show of participating wholeheartedly in interaction rituals” (53). Forced rituals are “energy draining, not EE creating, and the experience of going through many forced rituals will tend to make individuals averse to those kinds of ritual situations, even creating what appear to be antisocial personalities” (Collins 2004:53). Collins (2004) refers to this energy draining as “interaction fatigue.”

Facilitators were acutely aware of the adverse effects of forced rituals, and expressed said understanding in various ways. Taylor noted that “[Our small group] was a space that anyone should feel comfortable to share as much or as little as they wanted to share... having that

‘challenge by choice.’” Cane discussed their role as facilitator and how they negotiate forced participation by saying

You definitely don’t wanna be the person who, like, pushes them, like, don’t wanna force somebody to go into a place they don’t want to, but just allowing that openness and um, sharing personal experiences you’re comfortable with.

Here, Cane keyed in on a sentiment explicitly shared by seven other facilitators: if facilitators themselves participate in all camp rituals, campers will follow suit. Facilitators seemed to believe this was the best way to avoid forcing campers with “low” camp powers into rituals. To that end, when asked what they do to make their campers feel comfortable with the more intense Camp WildCat activities, Amy noted “Me and my co-facilitator- we both have to be, like, totally ourselves. We have to be, uhm, totally open, [and] wanting to make it fun.”

This mindset of “vulnerability begets vulnerability” to avoid forced rituals and therefore avoid interaction fatigue implies that facilitators themselves must have high enough emotional energy to jump-start the group interaction process during the more intense (and vulnerable) rituals. They make others *want* to participate in the ritual by using their own emotional state and communicate it accordingly with the depth of information they disclose about themselves. Indeed, in the official facilitator handbook, facilitators are asked to share first during Perspectives because “The participants will take the facilitator’s lead and model how they share based on how the facilitator does.” In other words, facilitators use their own camp powers to seize control of their small group’s shared mood and shift it into a place of comfortability and familiarity in which campers will voluntarily and enthusiastically share about themselves.

While forced rituals can successfully produce solidarity and group symbols, they lead to interaction fatigue in individuals who feel that they must manufacture their participation in the

ritual. Since forced rituals are inherently draining, they have no place in the emotional charging process, which leads to the fourth characteristic of emotional energy charging stations: they cannot involve forced rituals. Forced rituals in EE charging stations are avoided through attention to individual choice. Individual's choices to participate are then gently influenced by individuals of high EE (in this case, facilitators) exemplifying the kind of participation expected in a given ritual.

Perspectives: The Full Charge

“We can't promise you'll sleep a lot while you're at camp, but we can promise you will have an unforgettable experience.” -Camp WildCat's official self description.

Following a successful chain of non-forced, formal/facilitated rituals, supplemented by emerging natural/conversational rituals, campers are ready to partake in the peak intensity of Camp WildCat-- the most passionately and heavily discussed facilitation: Perspectives. Sally set the tone for this discussion and stated

Oh I love Perspectives... I appreciated getting to know [the campers] on a more in depth level and giving them autonomy to share what they felt like was important for us to know about them.”

Perspectives has four important dimensions as it relates to fostering emotional energy and serving as an effective interaction ritual: the differences between the stated objective of Perspectives and lived experience of the activity, the absence of any semblance of forced participation, the noticeable EE rush immediately following the facilitation, and how the activity lives on in memory as a high point of Camp WildCat.

According to the facilitator handbook, through Perspectives, campers are asked to share “Two identities or experiences that have contributed to their point of view.” This “on paper” goal

of Perspectives relates to identity. It is intended to help campers grow comfortable engaging with people different than themselves and understand the importance of social forces on one's worldview. Campers are encouraged to discuss any dimension of self-identity including race/ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, or childhood circumstances. Topics such as these have strong potential to be emotionally charged, so the *reality* of Perspectives differs than the written objective. Perspectives is not merely an introduction to social forces that make individuals unique; it is the peak of emotion and interaction intensity at Camp WildCat. When reflecting on her experience, Karen shared "We heard some really tough stuff that night about, like, pretty bad life experiences... I started sobbing," thus demonstrating the emotional state that can be induced through discussions such as Perspectives.

Speaking further to the lived experience, Jane commented

[Perspectives] went really really well... Every single [camper] went around and shared like went around and, ahm, answered a lot of, like, *deeper* questions. (Emphasis added.)

Only two of the eleven facilitators that mentioned Perspectives focused on the intentional "on paper" outcomes of the activity, the others seemed more interested in the depth of discussion and positive group interactions they experienced during and following the Perspectives facilitation.

In particular, facilitators praised Perspectives for its ability to avoid force when encouraging participation.

[Perspectives], I thought was really powerful because it like, not 'forces' everybody to share but, in a way, everybody does always end up sharing something about, like, how they are who they are, so just sharing like a deep story and then we always say, like, "you don't have to make it a deep story-- you can say something kinda like light and happy

that's made you who you are," but most of the campers always go for the- the deeper end. (Emphasis added).

In this quote, Sandy exemplified a dominant belief amongst facilitators that "deeper" discussions are better discussions. I speculate this belief grew out of facilitator's observations that sharing "deeper" things about oneself often correlated with increasingly intense displays of emotion which, of course, have the potential to heighten the entire Perspectives experience by strengthening emotional entrainment. It is also interesting to note that Sandy implies the opposite of "deep" disclosure is sharing something "light and happy."

The facilitator handbook requires one of the two group facilitators to begin Perspectives and set the emotional tone, and as discussed earlier, it appears that campers are quite likely to follow suit. So, Perspectives once again avoids becoming a forced ritual by creating an emotional environment and shared focus on an activity that makes campers *want* to share something "deep." In Leo's words, "[Campers] felt that they were in a safe place to do so because of the environment that Camp WildCat created."

Emotional energy at Camp WildCat clearly peaked following Perspectives. "After Perspectives we see a lot of people... who connected" said Kay. Sandy shared a similar sentiment, and claimed "After Perspectives, you could tell that [the campers] were so much more willing to open up." Similarly, Facilitator Andy noted that conversation seemed to flow easier following Perspectives than any other activity.

According to Collins, "Intense moments of interaction ritual are high points not only for groups but also for individual lives" (Collins 2004:53). Perspectives is one of these moments. It is certainly a high point for Camp WildCat, and for many attendees it is a peak experience in

their lives. Leo noted how unique his Perspectives was for him, and alluded to previous interactions where others expressed the same sentiment:

What happened in Perspectives was, and I'm sure you've heard this and I'm sure it gets cliché to a point, but it's different from anything that's ever happened to me.

Facilitator Karen mirrored this, saying, "I cannot stress enough how incredible [Perspectives] was." Amy called the activity "amazing."

However, it wasn't just the facilitators who appreciated Perspectives, many interviewees shared words of their campers regarding the activity. Jay observed the activity "got a really good reaction" from campers caused them to "open up." One facilitator shared that one of their campers stated they hadn't disclosed the information revealed in their Perspectives story with their closest friends from outside of camp.

Perspectives is the peak of Camp WildCat and a powerful emotional experience. The fact that Perspectives is reflected upon with such awe, and the fact that groups seemed to function better than ever following the activity, suggests that it is the peak charge that Camp WildCat provides. There are some other activities after Perspectives, but they do not request as much emotional investment, and are intended for the group to simply enjoy the solidarity they have developed through the interaction rituals at camp.

Perspectives embodies the fifth and final characteristic of charging stations: they have to end somewhere. One cannot indefinitely charge oneself with emotional energy, there must be a peak.

Camp WildCat: An Emotional Energy Charging Station

Collins (2004) saw emotional energy as enduring feelings of group membership that follow intense displays of emotion in rituals. My application of IRT to summer camps suggests

that this aspect of emotional energy can be modified. I argue there are certain situations in which interaction rituals provide individuals with a nearly immediate emotional energy payoff that is manifested through intense displays of emotional energy in a short period following the interaction ritual. These situations are EE charging stations.

Camp WildCat is an EE charging station because attendees enjoy a surge of emotional energy that is quickly burnt out and does not leave the long term enduring feelings of group membership as outlined by Collins. Throughout my analysis I highlighted five characteristics of emotional energy charging. To review, emotional energy charging stations:

1. Are universal
 - a. An individual's place on the EE continuum may influence their charging experience initially, but as the charger progresses, EE levels across the group grow more equal.
2. Rely on formal rituals that permit natural rituals to occur
 - a. The natural grows out of the formal.
3. Build EE through rituals that gradually and systematically increase in intensity
4. Abstain from forced rituals
 - a. Forced rituals are emotionally draining and may only charge certain individuals involved.
5. Have to have an end
 - a. There must be a single moment of peak intensity that reflects the extent to which the charging station allows build up of emotional energy.

The interesting thing about this particular charging station is that, while every facilitator had intended to plan a reunion for their small group, not a single one had. Some had kept in

touch with individual campers, or knew of pairs of campers that chose to room together in their freshmen dorm, but the small groups that charged each other in the Camp WildCat EE charging station seldom meet again. This further suggests the existence of EE charging stations as unique social settings because the EE they so efficiently build cannot manifest itself in long term enduring feelings of group membership, because the group no longer exists. Rather, EE from charging stations is spent through personal confidence and initiative that emerge following the charging process. It burns out far quicker, and is far more intense, than traditionally built emotional energy.

Conclusion

In this article, I have applied Randall Collins' interaction ritual theory to a new context, and used said application to extend his theory through conceptualizing emotional energy charging stations. I suggest that summer camps are able to provide the benefits they do (from increased self-esteem to social competence) because they are emotional energy charging stations.

The logical next step to explore EE charging stations as I have described them is to find other scenarios one could consider EE charging stations. From my personal observations, I speculate some other potential EE charging stations include ensemble members in theatrical productions, academic conferences, sports teams during a single season, and weddings.

If other situations can be identified as EE charging stations, and if said situations are found beneficial in similar ways to summer camps, then EE charging stations should be considered a resource with wide-ranging applications. For example, how might participation in an EE charging station affect one's performance at a job interview shortly following the charge? How might an EE charging station influence one's conduct in public spaces such as public transportation or shopping malls?

There is a potential dark side to EE charging stations. EE charging stations result in increased initiative to act according to the values of the group with which one charges. What would happen if the mutual focus of said group was another group, and the shared emotion was mutual hatred of said other group? I speculate the consequences could be increased likelihood of instances of violence or hateful rhetoric following that kind of EE charge.

There is also likely room to expand on EE charging stations conceptually, particularly as they relate to power and status. Collins' (2004) includes a lengthy discussion about the stratification of EE in society, and how it relates to racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, sexuality, religious affiliations and so on. I assert that EE charging stations are universal regarding an individual's EE levels at the beginning of the charging process. However, one's socio-economic background could potentially influence their experience in an EE charging station. Whether or not one has participated in a charging station before could also have an effect.

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