**EXPLORING THE MEANING OF SUMMER CAMP WITH TEENS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

Jenna Simpson, Laurentian University

**Objectives**: This research will explore the meanings that teens with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) ascribe to their experiences at summer camp. In partnership with Camp Winston, a sleepaway summer camp for children with neurological disorders, this study will take a participatory approach in order to amplify the neurodiverse voices of adolescents with ASD. Traditionally, qualitative research in the ASD field has focused on the experiences of parents or siblings as they relate to the child with ASD. Consequently, there exists a significant gap in understanding the unique experiences of living with ASD, particularly navigating social spaces as an adolescent with ASD. This study intends to address this gap by engaging with teens with ASD in order to better understand their personal experiences at summer camp and what these experiences mean to them.

**Methods**: This study will use qualitative methods, specifically photovoice with conversational interviews. Fifteen teens aged 13-17 with an ASD diagnosis will participate in the study. They will be given a disposable camera and given one week to take photos at Camp Winston with the prompt “What does camp mean to you?”. The photos will be developed, and each participant will select 5 photos to bring to a conversational interview. Interviews will be transcribed and coded using latent coding for thematic analysis.

**Results:** Work currently in progress. Data collection anticipated June-August 2018.

**Conclusions**: This Data Blitz will focus specifically on the methods used to engage with teens with ASD in a participatory way. The principles of photovoice can bridge social, emotional or cognitive gaps between researcher and participants and challenge the traditional power dynamic. The result is research that is participant centered and from the perspective of teens with ASD. As a result, I anticipate that photovoice will allow for rich results that are representative of the experiences of teens with ASD at Camp Winston.

**Correspondence:**

Jenna Simpson, B.Sc., current M.Sc. student

Laurentian University

jsimpson@laurentian.ca