

One Gender Camps – The Positives Outweigh the Negatives!

by Kim Winters, Camp Director

Date Written: April, 2003

In my years of working at co-ed and one gender camps, I believe the primary benefits and pitfalls of the one gender model have to do with three areas; freedom, in-depth issue coverage and modeling.

Freedom – the positive side

By removing a certain type of peer pressure that comes with a co-ed environment, our campers have a lighter load in terms of the performance burden so many youth find themselves under. At Tapawingo we pair this with a no tolerance policy on gossip, and have found the resulting atmosphere of sisterly love and acceptance to be the most loved (and least expensive) thing about Tapawingo.

Freedom – possible negatives

It is exciting to see girls set free to be silly in ways they would never be if boys were around. We do not have this problem at Tapawingo, but I would imagine the silliness could get out of control if left unbalanced.

In-depth issue coverage – the positive side

In an all-girls environment we can look more closely at the female side of relevant issues. We're able to take a deeper look at topics like: "Forgiving the Men Who Hurt Us," "Accepting The Body God Gave Us," and "Finding Our Self-worth in Christ," etc. I don't think we'd have as much time or freedom to teach in this way in a co-ed environment.

In-depth issue coverage – possible negatives

Camps that touch on the deeper gender issues must insure their front lines staff are getting enough sleep and are maintaining good emotional balance in the cabin. We try to limit late night "emoting sessions" by being strict about lights out. We believe if a camper has come to a life changing realization, the extra sleep will help her stick to her resolution come 7:00 a.m. the next day.

Modeling – the positive side

We believe our staff teach more about Who God is with their lives than with their words. In a one-gender camp, campers get a rare glimpse of a walk with Christ that is void of the common comforts of life (i.e. television, money, a normal mattress and men). Campers and staff alike are able to discern in themselves and others the need to have their joy coming from their walk with Christ, as opposed to their walk with Tom. It's exciting to see campers and staff discover the unchanging motivation of a love for Christ, Who is always there, even when boys aren't.

Modeling – possible negatives

One-gender camps need to be careful to communicate their respect and Christ-like love of the "other" gender. If they are not careful, their campers may get the idea that life would be better without the opposite sex. At Tapawingo we are clear about the importance of the entire body of Christ (male and female), and our responsibility to be the type of "sisters" that inspire more Christ-likeness in the boys and men God has placed in our lives.

This desire is greatly aided by our relationship with our brother camp, **Deerfoot Lodge**. Instead of a "battle of the sexes" we enjoy a harmony with them that reflects Christ and the church. It starts in staff training when they take time out of their schedule to have our entire staff over to their property to share with us all their knowledge and expertise in the various activity areas we share. In return, we invite their entire staff to our

island for a time of worship and communion. It is truly beautiful to see the body of Christ come together in such a simple and harmonious way! And that sense of appreciation and care for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is carried through all summer long. Despite little or no personal contact (except for our two staff training get togethers mentioned above), our staffs faithfully pray for each other and send letters and packages of encouragement to one another. The benefit of the ongoing encouragement between the two “one gender” camps goes far beyond anything either camp expected. But I guess it shouldn’t surprise us when God blesses His own plan for the body of Christ!