

Envisioning Normality

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*“The thing about camp is that no matter who you may be back in the valley you can start over here; you can take off your mask and try out different ways of dealing with other people. Because people here won't judge you, you can decide what kind of person you want to be.”**

“Envisioning Normality” looks at how youth with serious illnesses, chronic disorders and disabilities maintain a sense of normality in their life and how they seek to define their identity in the face of continual life disruption and physical limitation. Marrying a documentary realist style with participant observation-based ethnography, this project looks at the embodied illness experience from an adolescent and childhood perspective. This work explores how positive self-image and identity reconstruction are encouraged by participating in the embodied and collective social experience of summer camp in rural, upstate New York.

Taken from a larger ethnographic project, the selected images focus specifically on how campers “perform normality” to fit culturally prescribed roles in relation to their own bodily perception and self-image. Childhood is a series of performances for a variety of audiences and through exploring different roles, children learn who they are and want to be. This view of childhood performance goes beyond the idea of actors masking another reality and instead looks at performance as a way to define personal narrative. Through the embodied performance of normality, campers can transform the meanings attached to their illness whilst reconstructing a more positive body and self-image.

This project also involves the use of photography as a collaborative and therapeutic tool through

which children can reflect upon themselves and how their experiences at camp impact their developing sense of self. Campers were taught to use digital cameras and through a series of reflexive exercises explored topics ranging from nature photography to selfportraiture.

For more information on the ethnographer/photographer or this project please see the website <http://janacarrey.scarrey.com/jana.htm> and reference the accompanying book under Visual Anthropology Work, *Envisioning Normality: The Ethnographic Photographic Essay*.

* Anonymous quote taken from "Tillery, Randal K. 1992. Touring Arcadia: Elements of discursive simulation and cultural struggle at a children's summer camp. In *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (3): 374-388."

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