

One of the most powerful lessons I took from the discussion with Brooke was unexpectedly something I learned, but something from my previous view of the world that I unlearned. As a mostly left-brained student who has always been very logic and math oriented, I naturally tend to view the world as a story told by numbers. This has especially applied in science classes where results and phenomena are described by a series of numerical measurements. Brooke's lecture helped me unlearn this paradigm and invite me to consider a world described by stories. She emphasized that when systems actors look at a system and reduce it to what can be described by large-scale numeric summaries often neglects the variation in experiences by individuals which are affected by numerous emotional past experiences and perspectives.

I realized that I had used this logic as a systems actor in my summer position as a Girl Scout Day Camp counselor. Similar to Brooke, I held multiple stakeholder roles. Currently, I acted as a counselor who ran the unit of 10-15 grade school-aged girls, along with 2 assistant counselors in early high school. This allowed me to be a systems actor and determine how the unit would be run. Since I had grown up attending the camp since Kindergarten, I also had experience as a camper, and as an assistant counselor.

One activity in the system which I had to define rules for was cooking meals. The group had to walk across the camp to pick up ingredients, prepare ingredients, cook ingredients, gather fire building materials, start the fire, create a centerpiece, select a grace (secular prayer or giving thanks), and lead the group in a grace. Clearly, this could be made easier by breaking the group up into teams. We had a cooking team, a fire building team, and a hostess team. Since we had 12 girls, I assigned 6 to cooking, 3 to fire building, and 3 to hostess. This worked out very well numerically since each girl would rotate through each team, spending 2 days cooking. The 2 assistant counselors and I would each lead a team. We had fun decorating a cute pie chart with safety pins to keep track of teams.

On the numerical level, this worked great. My idea of the system with boundaries that treated each person as merely a placeholder in the rotation. However, some problems started to arise. Since the girls were young, they did not always want to listen to the group they were assigned to and they were easily distracted, so meal time would often result in girls running around everywhere playing tag or other shenanigans. I remembered that when I was a camper, I was very scared of getting near to the fire. When I would try to make a smore, I would stand so far away from the fire that the marshmallow wouldn't even warm up. I wondered whether some of the girls were facing this problem. I asked, and it turns out they were. I also found out that some girls were scared of using knives, or thought touching certain food items was gross.

I then realized that my conceptualization of the system produced a double bind. I was only considering the number of people in each role, not their individual stories. As a systems actor and rule-maker, this caused lack of functionality for the system. Once I expand my boundaries to include stories, we were able to work together and help each girl learn about their own strengths and weaknesses and how to grow from them.