The Emerging Dimensions of Camp Research*

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Camp…

- “Better Camping for All”
- “Camp Gives Kids a World of Good”
- “Enriching Lives, Building Tomorrows”

Traditional Definitions

- Supervised Group Living in the Outdoors

- Camps aim to promote active participation, caring relationships, and emotional, social, spiritual, and physical growth for campers and staff

History of Research about Camps

- 1929—Dimock and Hedley (YMCAs and character development)
- 1955—Barbara Ellen Joy (Annotated Bibliography on Camping)
- 1982—Brookhiser and van der Smissen (Camp Bibliographies)
- 2004—Committee for the Advancement of Research and Evaluation (ACA)

Challenges in Conducting Camp Research

- Purposive and Convenience Samples
- Small Scale Applications
- Lack of Standardized Instruments
- Intrusiveness of Methods
- Focus Primarily on Individual
- Difficulty in Applying Experimental Designs

Camp Study Areas

- Operations
- Outcomes

Operations

- Staffing
  - Characteristics
  - Recruitment
  - Motivations
  - Contributions to Work Force

Operations

- Camp Evaluations
  - Internal Application
  - Descriptive
  - Focus on Perceptions/Reactions

Operations

- Business Analyses
  - Economic Impact
  - Staff Salaries
  - Redux stuff—add in here

Outcomes

- Self-Constructs
- Social Relationships
- Spiritual Development
- Issues of Children with Disabilities

National Outcomes Study

Camper Growth Instruments (CGI)

- Pre-, post-, 6 month surveys with >5200 campers and their parents
- Pre- and post- counselors' observation checklists
- Directors' survey

Major Findings (*Directions*)

- Significant growth in all 4 domains (Positive Identity, Social Skills, Physical & Thinking Skills, and Positive Values & Spirituality)
- Much of the growth was maintained over 6 months
- Parents indicated significant growth for their children in all 4 domains as a result of the camp experience as did the children's counselors

Needs That Emerged From The National Outcomes Study

Need additional outcomes tools

- Outcomes measures that are “modular”
- Age-appropriate choices
- Easy to administer and analyze surveys
- Reliable and valid instruments

Need a “workbook” suitable for seasonal staff training

- Help staff connect their job responsibilities to outcomes
- “Recipe for success” (logic model)
- Facilitator guides

Need to look at how to provide an environment that supports positive youth development

ACA Camp Outcomes Surveys*

- Friendship Skills
- Responsibility
- Independence
- Family Citizenship
- Teamwork
- Competence
- Exploration

*Reliable and valid measures

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Benchmark & PIP Studies

Phase 1: Benchmarked supports and opportunities perceptions of 7645 campers at 80 ACA accredited camps with YDSI survey

Phase 2: Program improvement year long process with 23 of the 80 camps

Community Action Framework for Youth Development

© Connell & Gambone 1998

Build Community Capacity and Conditions for Change (E)

Implement Community Strategies to Enhance Supports and Opportunities for Youth (D)

Increase Supports and Opportunities for Youth (C)

--Adequate nutrition, health and shelter

--Multiple supportive relationships

--Meaningful involvement

--Challenging and engaging skill building activities

--Safety

Improve Youth Development Outcomes (B)

Improve Long-Term Outcomes in Adulthood (A)

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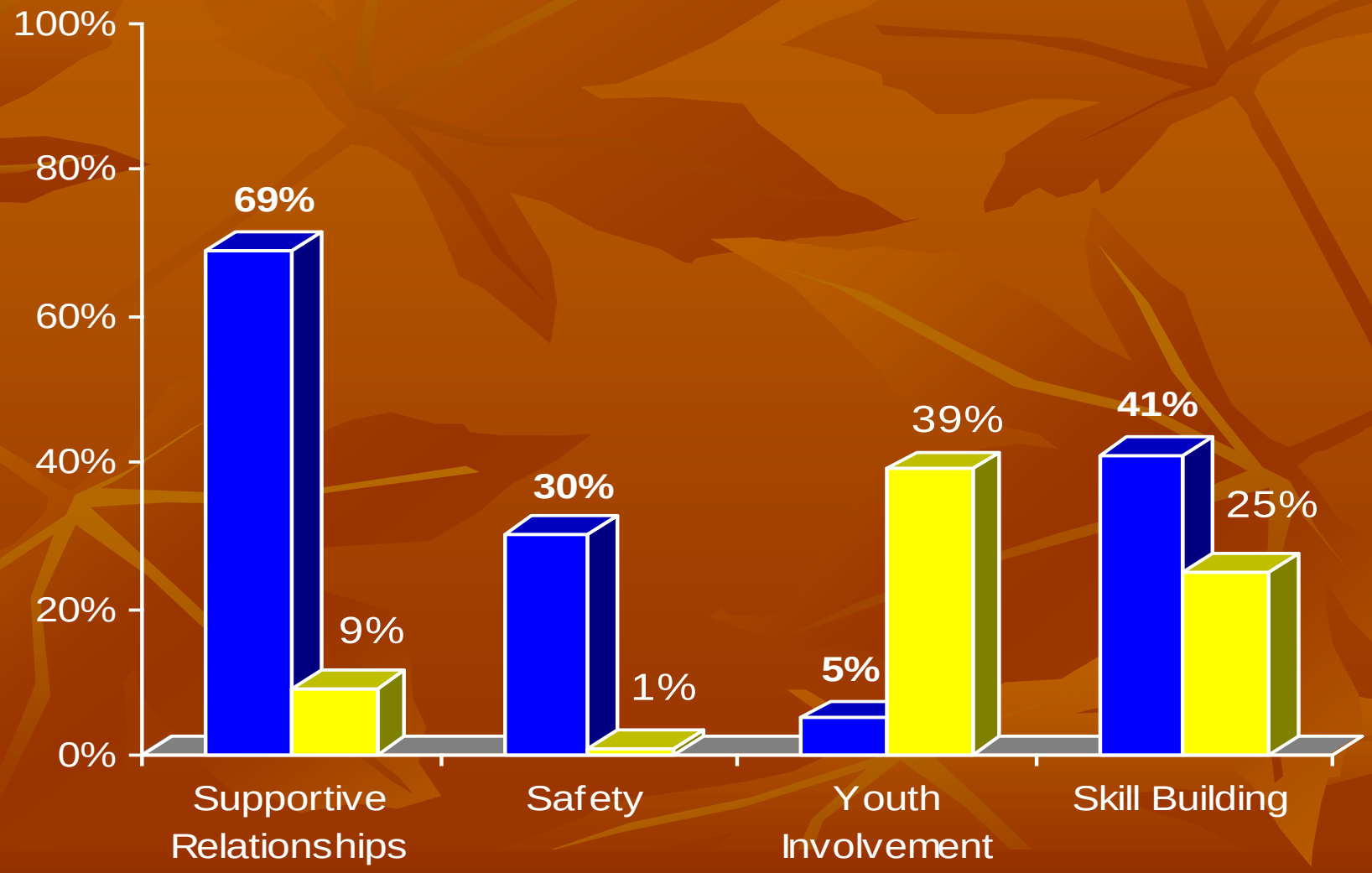
Overall Supports and Opportunities

(Optimal) **(Insufficient)**



Findings About PIP Strategies

- Grouped individual strategies into 7 categories:
  - Mission- related
  - Camp activities
  - Programming/scheduling changes
  - Staffing patterns
  - Camper input & involvement in planning and decision-making
  - Staff training
  - Facility

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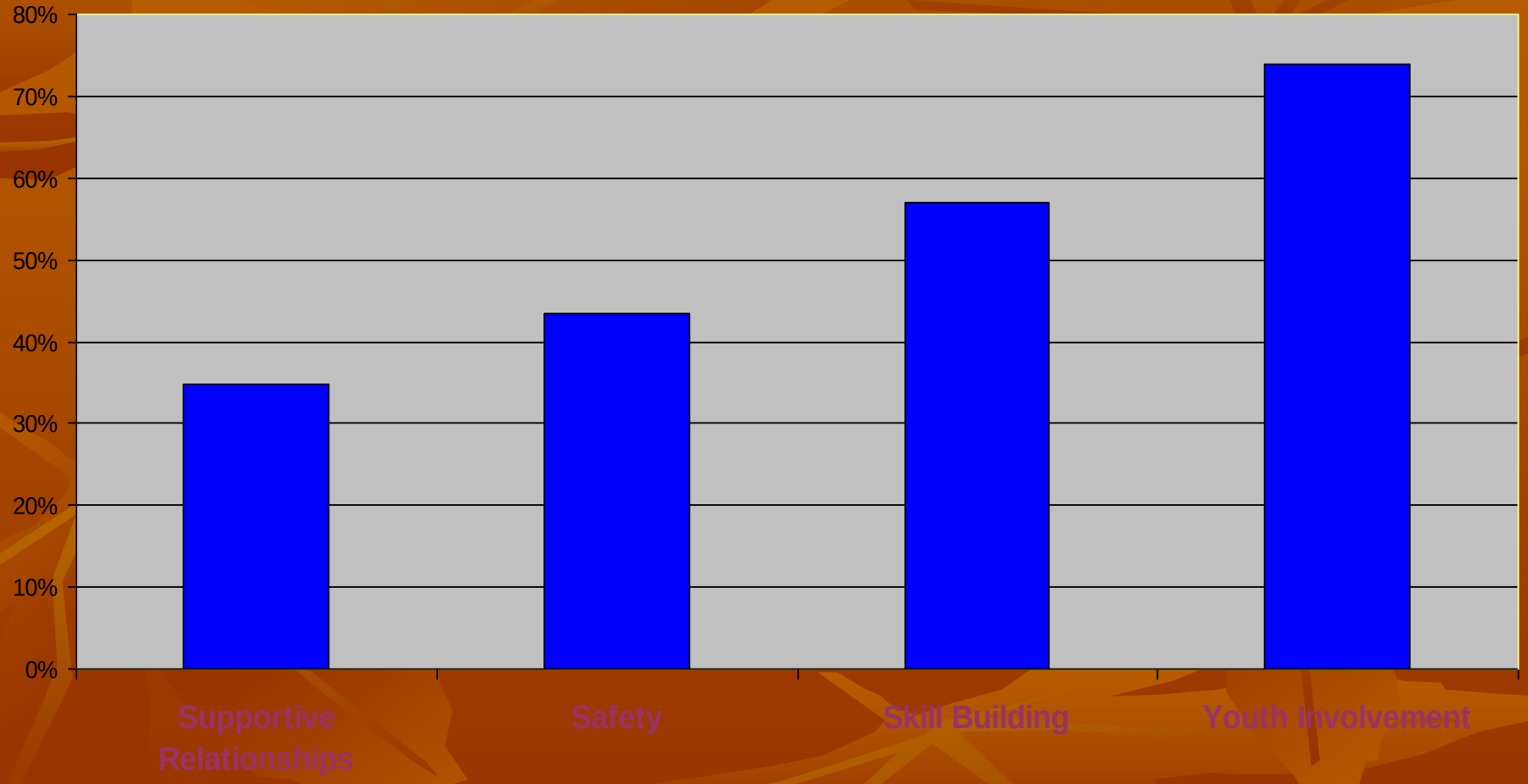
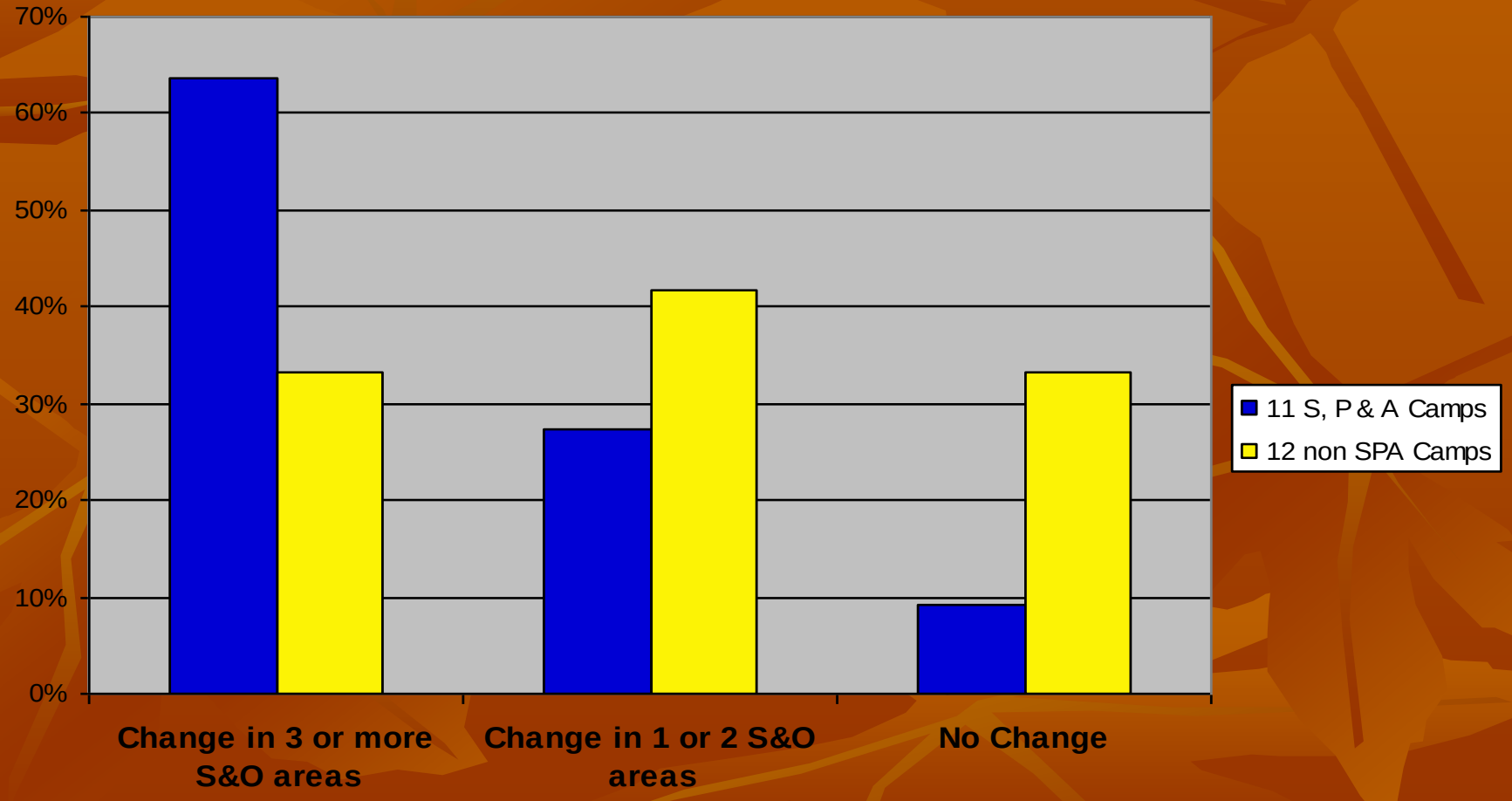
Percent ACA PIP Camps with Positive Change in 1 or More Dimensions



Rate of Improvements Associated with Level of Implementation

(Structure, Policy and Activities)



The Future

- Short-Term and Long-Term Benefits
- Longitudinal Studies
- Therapeutic Camps and “Integrated” Camps
- Social Ecology of Camps
- Youth Development and Emerging Adults
- Evidence-Based Research
- Linking Program to Outcomes
- Family Camping
- Influence of Outdoors on Camp Experiences