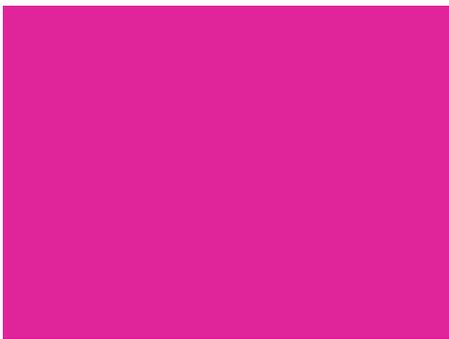


Canadian Summer Camp Research Project

Phase 3

Parent Perception of Changes in Children after Returning Home from Camp



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Funding for the Project

The Canadian Summer Camp Research Project (CSCRП) was made possible by support from: the Canadian Camping Association (CCA), the University of Waterloo/Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada seed grant program, and University of Waterloo Robert Harding Humanities and Social Science Endowment Fund.

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Special Thanks

The research team would like to thank all parents for their insightful contribution aimed towards the improvement of summer camps.

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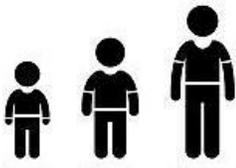
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Executive Summary

This report focuses solely on Phase 3 of the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project (CSCR), which includes findings from a survey on parent perceptions of changes in their child after returning home from camp. Particular attention was paid to whether skills developed or maintained at summer camp were transferable to the child’s daily life, specifically regarding three critical contexts: (a) family, (b) educational settings, and (c) community life.

Data include information from 1,405 parents of campers between the ages of 4 and 18. Over 110 summer camps across Canada were reported in this project, including residential, day, religiously-affiliated, those specifically designed for special needs, and specialty type programs.

Findings indicate overall positive development in the following five key outcome areas: social integration and citizenship; environmental awareness; attitudes towards physical activity; emotional intelligence; and self-confidence and personal development. Significant relationships between a number of camper characteristics and outcomes demonstrated the following overall changes in attitudes and behaviour noticed by parents:

 <p>Older children tend to experience the greatest changes in attitude and behaviour</p>	 <p>Children who stay at camp longer experience greater positive change in developmental outcomes</p>
 <p>Girl campers tend to experience significantly greater levels of social integration and citizenship than boys</p>	 <p>Returning campers tend to experience greater positive change than first time campers</p>

Project Overview

The purpose of the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project (CSCR) was to examine outcomes children experience after participating in a summer camp program. To explore this experience in-depth, a three-phase study was conducted, focusing on different groups involved in summer camps: camp directors; camp counsellors; and parents of campers. Overall, the objectives of CSCR were to:

- Explore camp professionals' experiences regarding camper outcomes;
- Understand the changes in behaviour and/or attitudes experienced by campers immediately after participating in a camp program; and
- Determine whether skills developed at camp are transferrable to home, school, and community contexts.

Phase 1

65 camp directors were interviewed about the changes or outcomes they had observed in campers over the course of their careers in the Canadian camping industry

Phase 2

During a Canadian summer camp season, camp counsellors observed and recorded 1,288 campers' behaviours and/or attitudes at the beginning and end of a camp session

Phase 3

1,405 parents were asked to reflect upon changes in their child's behaviour and attitudes from prior to attending a Canadian summer camp to returning home

For a more detailed report on Phase 1 and 2 of CSCR, please visit:
<http://healthycommunities.uwaterloo.ca>

Key Outcome Areas

Key findings from Phase 1 CSCRP revealed five areas where camp directors expected campers to experience positive outcomes (Glover et al., 2011):



Social integration and citizenship

Access to a wider social network with closer bonds to more friends and/or staff and with other camp alumni through shared experiences



Environmental awareness

Leads a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle, reduces ecological footprint, and encourages environmental responsibility



Attitudes towards physical activity

Participates in more physical activities within home, school, and community contexts



Emotional intelligence

More balanced and self-aware, thereby capable of empathy and relating to others on an emotional level



Self-confidence and personal development

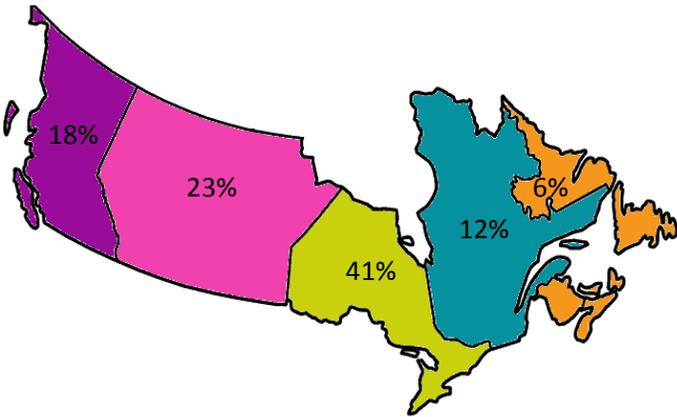
More flexible, resourceful, and self-aware, thereby better able to deal with life's challenges

Characteristics of Camps, Parents, and Campers

“Summer camp was a valuable life experience for my child. He relates several activities he did there to other events/activities in his daily life, all of them in a positive manner.”

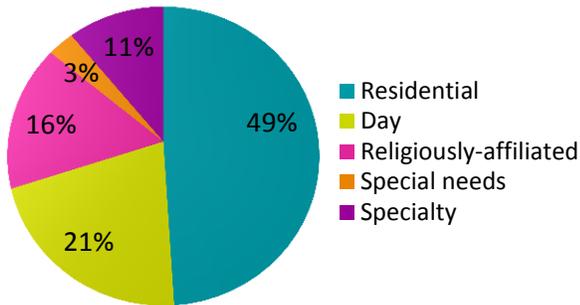
Camps

- Over 110 different Canadian summer camps were reported by parents and dispersed throughout Canada as follows: Western (18%), Central (23%), Ontario (41%), Quebec (12%), and Atlantic (6%).



- Program types included: Residential (49%), Day (21%), Religiously-affiliated (16%), those Designed for children with special needs (3%), and Specialty (i.e. science, language, music, sport) (11%).

Program Type



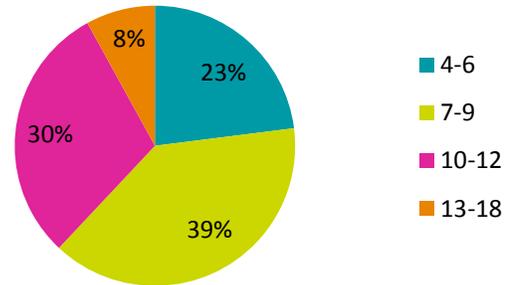
Parents

- 1,405 parents participated in the study
- Mean family household income was \$110,000 to \$119,000
- Household family structure was predominately comprised of two parents (80%)

Campers

- Age ranged between four and eighteen years old, but the average camper was 9 years old.

Age



- Gender was evenly split (49% girls and 51% boys).
- Of the total campers, 81% had previously attended summer camp, with 64% returning to the same camp as the year before.
- Regarding length of stay, 16% participated for less than a week, 46% for one week, 16% for 2 weeks, and 22% for 3 weeks or more.

Method of Collecting the Information

In accordance with the five key outcome areas previously outlined, a survey instrument was developed to determine any changes in the children's attitudes or behaviour that parents noticed since they had returned from camp.

Demographic information was collected about parents (i.e., household yearly income, household family structure), as well as information about their child (i.e., age, gender, language, cultural background, province of residence, whether s/he had attended camp previously, type of camp programs offered, and length of stay at camp).

Parents were asked to rate statements based on the five key outcome areas. Each item was scored so that a higher number indicated stronger agreement with the statements (1= very strongly disagree, 6= very strongly agree). After rating each scale, parents were also provided with the option to add any additional information.

Key outcome areas	Since returning home from camp, my child:
Social Integration and Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has stayed in touch with camp friends; • Has stayed in touch with staff members; and • Feels a sense of membership or belonging to the camp's broader community when talking about her/his experiences therein
Environmental Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates more environmentally friendly behaviors; and • Demonstrates more interest in outdoor activities and pursuits
Attitudes towards physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates in more physically active pursuits at home; • Participates in more physically active pursuits at school; and • Participates in more physically active pursuits as extra-curricular activities
Emotional intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays more awareness of her/his emotions as s/he experiences them; • Is more likely to share her/his emotions with others; • Has better control over her/his emotions; and • Is more sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others
Self-confidence and personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is able to do more things on her/his own; • Expresses more interest in trying new things; • Demonstrates increased self-confidence when facing challenges; and • Is better able to deal with challenges on her/his own

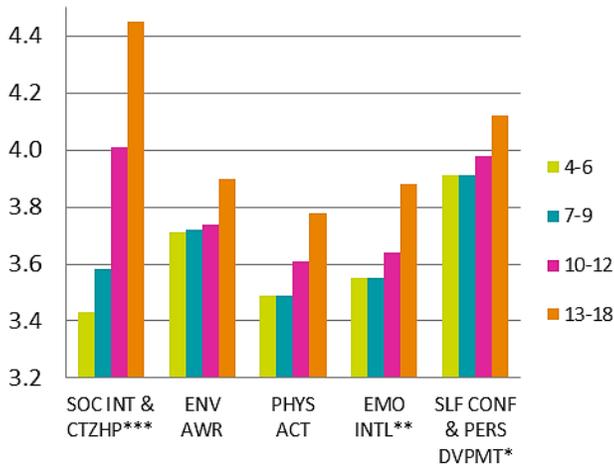
Survey Findings

Parents perceived positive development in all five key outcome areas. Detailed analysis further revealed that gender, age, length of stay at summer camp, and being a returning camper were all positively associated with changes in attitudes and behaviour.

Age

Older campers seemed to experience significantly greater levels of change in all five key outcome areas with respect to social integration and citizenship.

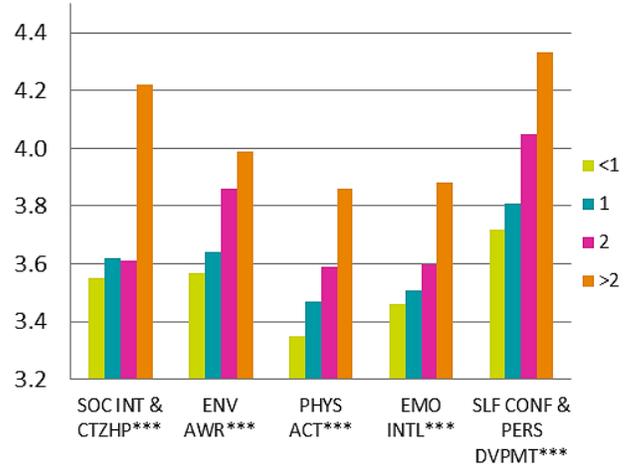
Changes in Attitude and Behaviour: Age (years)



Length of stay

Findings indicate children who stay at camp longer experience greater changes in the five key outcome areas.

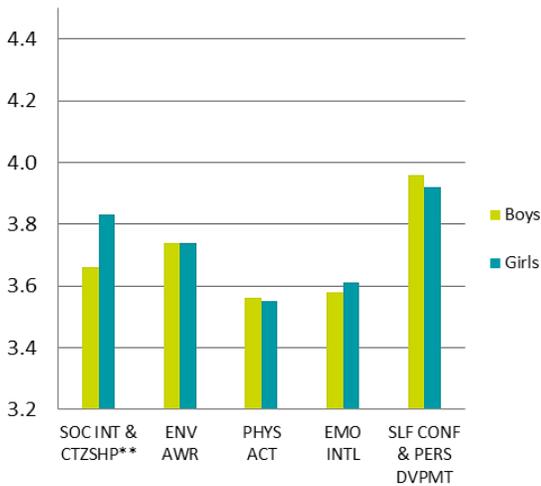
Changes in Attitude and Behaviour: Length of Stay (weeks)



Gender

Findings indicate that girl campers tend to experience greater levels of social integration and citizenship than boys.

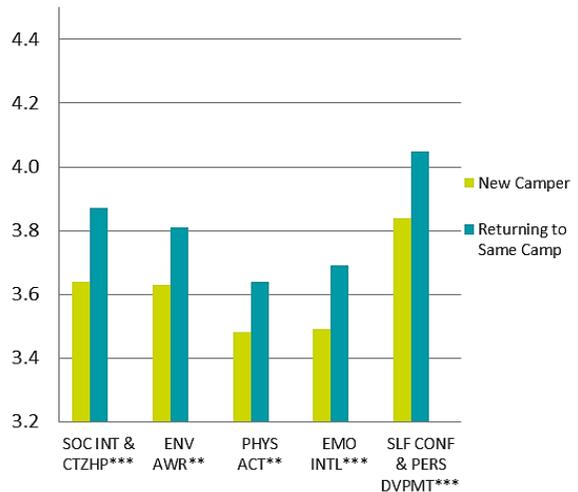
Changes in Attitude and Behaviour: Gender



New/Returning Camper

Findings indicate returning campers overall experience greater positive changes in attitude and behaviour.

Changes in Attitude and Behaviour: New/Returning Camper



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Rating scale (1= very strongly disagree, 6= very strongly agree)

Parents in Their Own Words



Social integration and citizenship

- “My child’s social interaction with adults is better. She carries conversations with others in a more mature manner. She is also no longer argumentative over doing chores at home.”
- “What I’ve noticed most in my child is a keen desire to be a leader. He expresses a wish to be a camp counsellor and frequently talks about the life choices he is making now that are in line with achieving that goal. He has since enjoyed teaching and helping other kids in the community.”
- “Since my son’s school only has one male teacher and I am a single parent, summer camp is really the only setting where he has an opportunity to be with male counsellors who serve as positive role models.”

Environmental awareness

- “He’s more conscious about his impact on the environment - shutting off appliances not in use, pollution, etc.”
- “My child started recycling for our family after returning home from camp.”
- “On the first day back from overnight camp, my son said that he liked camp way more than his Wii, T.V, iPod and iPad. I think that says it all!”



Attitudes towards physical activity

- “My child is really motivated to improve his swimming since returning home. Camp was a real breakthrough.”
- “When my son came home, in preparation for camp, he participated more in long-distance running and long-distance swimming, as there are awards associated with these activities at camp!”
- “Since returning home, my child signed up for athletics, acting, and music.”

Emotional intelligence

- “Upon returning home, my son was more sensitive and aware of his sister’s emotions and their interactions.”
- “Since camp, my child is very aware of those less fortunate, aware of classmates struggling with school work or social integration and...tries to go out of way to reach and help.”
- “My daughter used to be hypersensitive to the emotions and feelings of others. After camp she has found a healthy balance and now takes her needs and wants into consideration, and much more seriously.”
- “After camp, [my daughter] came out and actually told me how she felt while her sister was going through chemo.”



Self-confidence and personal development

- “Camp has helped my daughter become more self-confident and self-aware. She was very proud that she was able to sleep away from home for the first time.”
- “My child has taken ownership of his school responsibilities far beyond what he did last year.”
- “Since going to camp, my child is confident in his ability to do things on his own and is more willing to try new things at school, such as signing up for an overseas school trip.”
- “Camp changed his way of seeing things. Problems are more easily perceived as challenges.”

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest camps can be one answer to Bumbarger and Greenberg's (2002) and Gillham, Reivich, and Shatte's (2002) call for national programs that foster a broad range of positive outcomes, rather than programs that narrowly and strictly focus on decreasing unhealthy risk behaviors in children. It was found that Canadian summer camps of at least a week's duration provided, to some degree and for most children, an immersive experience that promoted development in five key outcome areas. According to parents, **positive changes in attitudes and behaviour continued or maintained after camp**. This finding aligns with previous Canadian summer camp research which found that learning transferability to daily life contexts can be traced back to the experiences that took place at camp (Fine, 2005).

Parent perceptions may provide camp directors and programming staff with insights useful for design innovations and developments. Given evidence that important developmental outcomes can be achieved through Canadian summer camp participation, marginalized groups and children from social/cultural backgrounds where camping is not a tradition could be identified so that outreach efforts can be accordingly made. Follow-up research could offer additional insights into the influence of the camp experience on development among children from various backgrounds that differ in terms of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, etc. Furthermore, though societal gender expectations might encourage girls to demonstrate more caring behaviour through greater interpersonal skills, camp directors and programming staff may wish to consider ways to foster greater social integration/citizenship at camp among boys.

It is also important to note that those parents who did not perceive behavioural or attitudinal changes in their child also indicated that their child's capacity in the outcome areas did not diminish. In fact, these parents generally indicated that **camp reinforces already developed skills and values**. Examples of this include: "Our child has always been outdoorsy and creative but camp has made this even more evident"; "My child is already very active and involved in sports but camp has strengthened his athletic skills"; and "Camp is a wonderful extension of the environmental education [my

child] receives at school. Camp helps to continue and fortify that education during the summer."

Consequently, camp was rarely an aversive experience for children, nor was it an experience reliably associated with significant negative changes among the outcomes measured. Rather, **camp allows for either improvement or reinforcement of positive attitudes and behaviours**. Many parents of returning campers mentioned that their children hope to someday become counsellors, thereby demonstrating continuity in the Canadian summer camp experience.

Phase 3 of the CSCRP provides additional evidence that **the positive development that occurs at camp results in behavioural changes at home, school, and community contexts. In short, the camp experience transfers to everyday life**. While the outcomes in the five domains of development examined were found to vary to some extent depending on differences among campers based on gender, age and camp experience, it was very clear that all campers regardless of these differences experienced positive outcomes and growth. Perhaps older campers generally show the greatest change in development because with greater maturity and social experience they are able to adapt to new situations with greater ease. Nevertheless, all four age groups examined were found to experience significant positive change, thereby providing good evidence that children continue to develop with subsequent camp experience. These findings support the expectations provided by camp directors in Phase 1 and observations noted by camp counsellors in Phase 2 of the study.



Appendix

METHOD

This purpose of Phase 3 of the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project (CSCR) was to provide data on parent perceptions of changes in their child after returning home from camp. Collected in 2011-2012, data include information from 1,405 parents, predominately from two parent (80%) households, with an average family income of \$110,000 to \$119,000. Age was recoded into four incremental groups according to camper's approximate grade school levels: Pre-K to K (4-6 years), Grades 1 to 3 (7- 9 years), Grades 4 to 6 (10-12), and High School (13-18). The average age group was 2.24, which corresponds to the 7-9 year olds. Nearly half (49%) of the campers were girls. Regarding returning campers, 64% attended the same camp as the year before. Regarding length of stay, 16% participated for less than a week, 46% for one week, 16% for 2 weeks, and 22% for more than 2 weeks. Over 110 different Canadian summer camps were reported by parents and dispersed throughout Canada as follows: Western (18%), Central (23%), Ontario (41%), Quebec (12%), and Atlantic (6%). Program types included: residential (49%), day (21%), religiously-affiliated (16%), those designed for children with special needs (3%), and specialty (i.e. science, language, music, sport) (11%).

Among the five key outcome areas, parents were asked to rate statements based upon changes (if any) noticed in their child since leaving summer camp. Each item was scored so that a higher number indicated a stronger agreement (1= very strongly disagree, 6= very strongly agree). *Social Integration and Citizenship* (SOC INTG & CTZHP) was a scale comprised of 3 items regarding camper's ability to stay in touch with camp friends and/or staff and their sense of membership or belonging to the camp's broader community ($\alpha = 0.70$). *Environmental Awareness* (ENV AWR) was assessed in response to camper's ability to demonstrate more environmentally friendly behaviors and interest in outdoor activities since leaving camp. The two variables were strongly correlated, $r(1121) = .73, p < .001$. *Attitudes towards physical activity* (PHYS ACT) was a scale comprised of 3 items regarding camper's involvement in more physically active pursuits at home, school, and/or community contexts since returning from camp ($\alpha = 0.84$). *Emotional intelligence* (EMO INTL) was a scale comprised of 4 items regarding camper's ability to better understand their own emotions and demonstrate sensitivity towards feelings of others ($\alpha = 0.91$). *Self-confidence and personal development* (SLF CONF & PER DVPMT) was a scale comprised of 4 items regarding camper's independence and ability to deal with challenges after attending camp ($\alpha = 0.93$).

RESULTS

Age: At the $p < .05$ level, a one-way ANNOVA revealed no significant association between age and ENV AWR, $F(3,1112) = 1.02, p > .05$; nor PHYS ACT, $F(3,1060) = 3.50, p > .05$. However, age differed significantly among SOC INTG & CTZHP, $F(3, 1128) = 36.49, p < .001$; EMO INTL, $F(3, 1059) = 5.13, p < .01$; and SLF CONF & PERS DVPMT, $F(3,1101) = 1.89, p < .05$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that for SOC INTG & CTZHP, the 13-18 ($M=4.46$) age group experienced significantly higher change than the 10-12 ($M= 4.01$) age group, which both experienced significantly higher change than the 4-6 ($M = 3.43$) and 7-9 ($M= 3.58$) age groups. For EMO INTL, the 10-12 ($M= 3.88$) age group experienced significantly higher change than the 4-6 ($M = 3.55$), 7-9 ($M= 3.55$), 10-12 ($M=3.64$) age groups. For CONF & PERS DVPMT, changes in age groups did not statistically differ from one another; 4-6 ($M = 3.90$), 7-9 (3.91), 10-12 (3.98), and 13-18 ($M=4.12$).

Gender: The t-test conducted revealed statistically significant differences between boys and girls in SOC INT & CTZSHP, $t(1074.75) = -2.73, p < .01$, with girl campers ($M= 3.83, SD=1.03$) receiving higher scores than boy campers ($M=3.66, SD= 1.01$). However, there were no significant differences between boys and girls in ENV AWR, $t(1066.99) = -.008, p = .993$; PHYS ACT, $t(1017.98) = .177, p = .860$; EMO INTL, $t(1014.35) = -.587, p = .558$; and SLF CONF & PERS DVPMT, $t(1055.39) = .774, p = .440$.

Length of Stay: At the $p < .05$ level, a one-way ANNOVA revealed length of stay differed significantly across the five key outcome areas: SOC INTG & CTZHP, $F(3, 1115) = 25.48, p < .001$, ENV AWR, $F(3, 1099) = 11.90, p < .001$, PHYS ACT, $F(3, 1048) = 15.90, p < .001$, EMO INTL, $F(3, 1046) = 16.35, p < .001$, SLF CONF & PERS DVPMT, $F(3, 1087) = 27.95, p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that for SOC INTG & CTZSHP, campers who attended for more than 2 weeks ($M=4.23$) had significantly higher positive change than those who attended for two weeks ($M=3.63$), one week ($M=3.62$), and less than a week ($M=3.55$). For ENV AWR, campers who attended for more than 2 weeks ($M= 3.99$) and 2 weeks ($M=3.86$) both had significantly higher change than those who attended for one week ($M=3.64$) and less than a week ($M=3.57$). For PHYS ACT, campers who attended for less than a week ($M=3.35$) and one week ($M=3.47$) did not significantly differ from one another, as was the case for those who attended for one week ($M=3.47$) and two weeks ($M=3.59$). Both of the aforementioned groups, however, differed from campers who attended for more than two weeks ($M= 3.86$). For EMO INTL, campers who attended more than 2 weeks ($M= 3.88$) had significantly higher change than those who attended for two weeks ($M=3.59$), one week ($M=3.51$), and less than a week ($M=3.46$). For SLF CONF & PERS DVPMT, campers who attended for

more than two weeks ($M = 4.33$) had significantly higher change than those who attended for two weeks ($M = 4.05$) and both had significantly higher change than those who attended for one week ($M = 3.81$) and less than a week ($M = 3.72$).

New/Returning Camper: The t-test conducted revealed statistically significant differences between first time and returning campers for all five outcome areas: SOC INT & CTZSHP, $t(779.29) = 3.48$, $p < .001$; ENV AWR, $t(754.95) = 3.09$, $p < .01$; PHYS ACT, $t(679.48) = 2.82$, $p < .01$; EMO INTL, $t(658.19) = 3.92$, $p < .001$; and SLF CONF & PERS DVPMT, $t(741.51) = 3.81$, $p < .001$. For SOC INTG & CTZSHP, returning campers ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.05$) experienced higher change than new campers ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .99$), as was the case for ENV AWR (Returning to Same Camp, $M = 3.81$, $SD = .90$ > New Camper, $M = 3.62$, $SD = .86$); PHYS ACT (Returning to Same Camp, $M = 3.64$, $SD = .85$ > New Camper, $M = 3.49$, $SD = .85$), EMO INTL (Returning to Same Camp, $M = 3.69$, $SD = .74$ > New Camper, $M = 3.49$, $SD = .75$), and SLF CONF & PERS DVLMPMT (Returning to Same Camp, $M = 4.05$, $SD = .83$ > New Camper, $M = 3.83$, $SD = .81$).

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