Profiles of Social Relationships for Low-Income Youth in Physical Activity Based Positive Youth Development Programs

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Introduction

Positive Youth Development
Positive youth development (PYD) programs are aimed at providing youth with resources to foster growth in personal and social assets and address barriers to well-being (Benbeni et al., 2006; Holt, 2008). PYD programs have the potential to be especially important to low income populations who have limited resources and are often disadvantaged in multiple areas (e.g., Kroenke, 2007; Votrub-Drzal, 2006). Physical activity settings are excellent PYD contexts because they are linked to improved physical and psychosocial health, and provide involved, interactive, emotional, and social context for teaching life skills (Hellion et al., 2008; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

Role of Social Relationships
Social relationships play an important role in the experience and outcomes of PYD programs (Benbeni et al., 2006). Physical competence, social competence, and support from program staff positively predict changes in physical self-worth, global self-worth, attraction to physical activity, and hope across a four-week summer program (Ulrich-French, McDonough, & Smith, under review). Leader support has also been linked to continued participation in the same summer PYD program (Ulrich-French & McDonough, under review). A positive relationship with a caring adult is a crucial element facilitating PYD (Gano-Overway et al., 2009; Catalano et al., 2004). Research with low-income youth has also showed that autonomy support from teachers and parents predicts physical activity behavior and motivation (Vierling, Standage, & Treasure, 2007).

Procedures and Measures
PYD program participants completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of the program on the following:

Social Relationship Measures:

Psychosocial Outcome Measures:

All measures demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability (α > .70).

Data Analysis
Hierarchical cluster analysis was performed with standardized scores of the social relationship variables at the end of the program to help determine the most appropriate cluster solution. Next, non-hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted using initial cluster centers identified from hierarchical analysis specifying a three cluster solution. This procedure was conducted with program A, then verified with program B data.

A MANOVA was conducted to examine differences between the clusters on social responsibility, social competence, and physical competence variables at the end of the program.

Results

Cluster Analysis
Three distinct profiles emerged. Consistent solutions were obtained with and without outliers, therefore complete samples were used. Program B data confirmed the three profiles.

Conclusions

• Although distinct "positive", "average", and "negative" social experience profiles emerged, the labels for clusters are relative and not in absolute terms. Participants had relatively high scores on the social relationship variables.

• However, profiles were significantly different on outcome variables, suggesting that small to moderate differences in social relationships in PYD programs may affect psychosocial outcomes that these programs aim to improve.

• Consistent findings across two independent PYD programs support generalizability of profiles and differences.

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