What About Your Friends?: Peer Support and Influence Among Black and Latina Girls in the SBYD Setting

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Abstract 2019-040 Room: Napoleon A2

While generally physical activity declines as youth age (National Physical Activity Plan Alliance, 2016), girls experience a higher level of decline than boys (Rew, Arheart, Horner, Thompson, & Johnson, 2015). In particular, this gender disparity becomes significant in early adolescence (Lenhart, Patterson, Brown, O’Brien, & Nelson, 2014). For girls of color, this drop off becomes steeper as they age, causing an even greater disparity in their participation rates in comparison to White girls (Kimm, Glynn, Kriska, Barton, Kronsberg, Daniels, & Liu, 2002).

Peer influence tends to be a strong predictor of adolescent physical activity (Spink, Wilson, & Ulvick, 2012). For girls specifically, social support from friends tends to be a significant predictor of adolescent girls’ physical activity levels (Kelly, Parra-Medina, Pfeiffer, Dowda, Conway, Webber, & Jobe, 2010). Girls themselves have spoken to the importance of support from friends in encouraging their physical activity (Baskin, Dulin-Keita, Thing, & Godsey, 2015) and negative peer experiences dissuading them from participating team (Slater & Tiggeman, 2010). However, this research has largely omitted the perspectives and experiences of girls of color, those most at risk of being physically inactive. A better understanding of the influence of friends and peers on the physical activity participation of early adolescent girls of color will help researchers better understand their participation choices. The purpose of this study will be to explore the nature of peer relationships, support, and influence among Black and Latina early adolescent girls in a sport based youth development (SBYD) program.

To achieve this purpose, I will use a case study design to explore this program which serves Black and Latina eighth grade girls and provides a context for both peer interaction and physical activity options. I will observe the girls’ interactions and relationships with their peers to determine the nature of peer support and influence in the context of the program and the ways these shape participation behavior. Program participants will be interviewed to better understand their perceptions of their behavior and the peer environment. Adult leaders will be interviewed informally after program sessions to note their observations and perceptions of the youth peer environment created in the program.

Field notes from observations and audio recordings from interviews will be transcribed and become a part of the case study database. These data will be coded inductively to determine themes that arise in the data. After a round of initial holistic coding, the constant comparative method will be used to further analyze the data.

This study is especially important as it addresses the gap in literature regarding Black and Latina girls’ physical activity choices. Better understanding the nature and role of peer support and influence among girls of color may be useful in improving the design and implementation of programming by youth sport practitioners. This study will likely support and expand previous research by adding new details as to current literature on peer influence in sport and physical activity settings and more avenues for studying peer dynamics in SBYD, physical activity, and sport programs.