The Invisible Hand: The Role of Context in Shaping the Environment of an SBYD Program Environment

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Sport Development - Other (Youth Sport) 10-minute lightning talk (including questions) Session: Corporate Social Responsibility/Youth Sport

Sport based youth development (SBYD) programs are means to provide sport and physical activity access to youth traditionally underserved youth in this regard (Youth Sports Collaborative Network, 2017). In particular, these programs provide girls who participate with an array of benefits, including the socioemotional, mental, and physical well-being (LaVoi, Strong, Pearson, Sken, Bruening, & Lerner, 2009). These programs are of particular interest because they are guided by a framework which encourages creating supportive environments (Perkins & Noam, 2007). These types of environments mirror those suggested by researchers as those best for improving physical activity among Black and Hispanic girls, those who most likely to be physically inactive (see Kelly et al., 2010; Baskin et al., 2015).

In the SBYD framework as presented by Perkins & Noam (2007), considerations for the supportive context include positive youth-adult and peer to peer relationships and the structure of the program (Perkins & Noam, 2007). In sport-based youth development (SBYD) programs there is evidence that youth perceptions of the environment of these programs is shaped by the motivational climate (Gould, Flett, & Lauer, 2012) the support they receive from adult leaders (Ullrich-French, McDonough, & Smith, 2012), opportunities for social skills learning, and behaviors modeled by adult leaders (McDonough, Ullrich-French, & McDavid, 2018). Each of these program aspects are tied to relationships and structures built into the program and controlled by adult leaders. However, authors within the positive youth development literature, the framework upon which the SBYD framework was based, highlight the importance of another important factor for youth outcomes: context (Lerner et al., 2012). The impact of programs depends upon youths’ access to other physical and institutional resources, other relationships in the social environment, collective activity or community engagement, and the accessibility of contextual resources. Therefore factors external to programs weigh heavily on youth outcomes. The purpose of this lightning talk is to propose the need to consider the role of these contextual factors in shaping the environment within SBYD programs.

This proposal is drawn from a larger case study of a school-based SBYD program for Black and Hispanic early adolescent girls. Data was collected through observations of programming and the greater school environment and from interviews with adolescent participants and adult leaders. Key themes discussed in this lightning talk will include those related to the interplay within the school climate and the environment of the program. The expectations of teachers, aggression from peers, and school wide gender dynamics influenced the girls’ participation in and perception of the program. These elements also influenced the ways in which leaders experienced and shaped aspects of the program. These findings will be presented as an example of the ways factors outside of the control of program leaders influenced the environment of the program. The goal of this talk is to encourage more discussion of how external contexts- including the resources and climate in the greater community and structures housing the program- are important considerations for practitioners in program development and researchers who attempt to determine program outcomes.