Social Responsibility & Social Relationships Among Youth

LiFEsports is a sport-based positive youth development initiative aimed at better understanding staff practices and programs related to promoting youth developmental outcomes. In order to help disseminate the initiative’s innovative research, LiFEsports has developed a series of Research Briefs summarizing findings from various research projects. The current summary, originally published in *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* (McDonough, Ullrich-French, Anderson-Butcher, Amorose, & Riley, 2013), discusses the influence of leader emotional support and leader autonomy support on youth outcomes related to social responsibility and feelings of belonging. Additionally, practical implications for researchers, program administrators, and youth development workouts are highlighted.

### Study Aims

Research in positive youth development (PYD) has identified that youth develop internal assets such as social responsibility through fostering meaningful relationships with peers and adult staff. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine whether youth perceptions of belonging in the program, emotional support from program staff, and autonomy support afforded by program staff – and the interactions among these three variables – predicted changes in self-perceptions of social responsibility. Moreover, as a method of more fully investigating such impacts, the study investigated youth participants from two different physical activity-based PYD summer camps designed for low-income youth.

### Social Relationships & Social Responsibility

At the heart of many PYD programs is the aim of fostering the development of youth prosocial behaviors such as social responsibility. Within the context of PYD, social responsibility refers to attitudes and initiative to respect the rights of others, being a responsible citizen, and avoiding violent and destructive behaviors. PYD research and literature theorize that having a sense of belonging (i.e., engagement, commitment to, and connectedness) with both peers and staff within PYD programs can facilitate youths’ measures of social responsibility. Specifically, research suggests that such programs can foster personal and social responsibility by genuinely caring about, respecting, and listening to youth as well as gradually shifting power and decision-making from staff to youth.

### Methods

Four primary measures were used examine if a sense of belonging, staffs’ emotional support, and staffs’ autonomy support predicted youths’ self-perceptions of social responsibility. This study used data collected from two separate physical activity-based PYD summer camps designed to facilitate youth developmental outcomes of low-income youth, both of which former National Youth Sport Program (NYSP) camps. Program A consisted of 272 youth (137 boys, 135 girls) between the ages of 10-14 (M = 11.31, SD = 1.22) from an array of ethnic backgrounds (41.4% Hispanic, 34.7% White, 9.7% Black, 7.5% multi-racial, and 6.7% Asian). Sample B consisted of 438 youth (257 boys, 179 girls, 2 did not report gender) between the ages of 9-16 (M = 12.09, SD = 1.57) and were also from a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds (77.4% Black, 12.3% multi-racial, 2.7% Native American, 1.4% White, 1.1% Asian, 3.7% other, and 1.4% unreported). Additionally, Program A had 58 total staff members which included 24 group leaders, and Program B had 61 total staff members also with 27 group leaders.
Results
A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to test whether youth self-perceived measures of belonging, leader emotional support, autonomy support, and all two-way and three-way interactions significantly predict changes in social responsibility. Preliminary results indicated that pretest measures of social responsibility significantly predicted posttest measures of social responsibility, and the social relationship variables accounted for a significant increase in the variance with belonging being a significant positive predictor. In regards to the two-way interactions, leader emotional support and autonomy support as well as leader emotional support and belonging were both found to be significant. In other words, when leaders were more emotionally supportive, there was a positive relationship between autonomy support and social responsibility. When leaders were less emotionally supportive there was a positive relationship between belonging and social responsibility. Results indicated, however, that that the three-way interaction was not found to be significant.

Discussion
The results of this study supports the belief that social relationships with peers and adults positively predict changes in social responsibility in physical activity-based PYD programs, with findings providing evidence that youths’ sense of belonging is the primary predictor of changes in social responsibility. Specifically, having staff members who are both emotionally supportive and autonomy supportive predicts changes in measures of social responsibility over and above the effects of belonging alone. This interaction between leader emotional support and autonomy support implies that, for program staff, being both emotionally supportive and fostering autonomy among youth may be particularly important for optimizing youths’ developmental outcomes such as social responsibility.

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<th>Implications for the Field</th>
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<td>Researchers</td>
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<td>• The Social Sports Experiences Scale can be used in the current study can be utilized to investigate measures of youths’ self-perceptions of social responsibility</td>
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<td>• Further research is needed to explore individual social relationship variables as there were a strong correlation among social relationship variables</td>
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The LiFEsports Initiative is a collaborative endeavor sponsored by the Department of Athletics and College of Social Work at the Ohio State University. For more information, please visit our website at: www.osulifesports.org or contact us at LiFESports@buckeyes.ath.ohio-state.edu.

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