Gender Differences in the Temporal Relationship Between Youth Development Program Participation and Self-Competence in Adolescents

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Introduction and Methods

Background:
- According to relational developmental systems theories, ecological assets provided by youth development programs foster the development of self-competence (Lerner, Johnson, & Buckingham, 2015).
- Development of self-competence may promote positive contributions to the self, community, and society through involvement in youth programs (Lerner et al., 2015).
- The role of gender in these bidirectional relationships is unknown.

Objective: To examine gender differences in the bidirectional relationship between youth development program participation and self-competence among adolescents.

Participants:
- 1,022 adolescents (15-17 years) from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States
- 53% girls; 51% non-Hispanic White

Procedures:
- Adolescents completed surveys during school in the spring of 2007 (T1) and the spring of 2008 (T2).

Methods and Results

Measures:
- Weekly participation in youth development programs
  - Organized sports
  - School clubs
  - Volunteer work
  - Religious activities
- Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA, Harter, 2012)
  - Academic competence (αs = .77-.78)
  - Athletic competence (αs = .87)
  - Social competence (αs = .75-.77)
  - Perceived physical appearance (αs = .88)

Unconstrained Model Fit: χ²(6) = 9.12, p > .05; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .02, 90% CI = .00, .04.

Figure 1. Standardized Path Coefficients for Significant Paths in the Unconstrained Model for Girls.

Conclusions:
- A bidirectional, prospective relationship is apparent between sports participation and athletic competence for both girls and boys.
- Encouraging girls to be involved in volunteer work and boys in religious activities may foster distinct aspects of their self-competence.
- Fostering social competence may encourage greater participation in youth development programs, thereby promoting positive contributions to the self and the community.

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