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Youth Functioning and Experiences in Inner-City After-School Programs Among Age, Gender, and Race Groups

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Abstract

Many dangers and challenges face inner-city minority children during their after-school hours. Youth development programs provide an alternative to spending this time unsupervised. We examined the relationship between children's experiences in selected urban Boys and Girls Clubs and child functioning. Because the sample (*N = 296*) consisted of African American and Hispanic boys and girls, aged 10–18, we were able to compare these relationships across race, gender, and age groups. There was no relationship between simple participation levels and child functioning, but significant linkages were identified between specific elements of the club experience and functioning. Relationships with club staff members and participation in club activities were associated with better functioning for older boys, a subgroup that is at considerable risk for delinquency. In addition, enjoyment of the club and not feeling badly treated there were associated with better functioning for all groups of children.

Keywords

functioning; after-school programs; social support; self-esteem; behavior problems

There are many challenges facing inner city children during their afterschool hours. Because of the demands of work and the low wages available in urban communities, there is often no adult at home when school is over. Inner-city schools often lack athletic programs and clubs that might occupy and engage children in the afternoons. There may be a dearth of wellmaintained public parks or other recreational facilities, such as can be found in more affluent communities, that offer opportunities for physical, emotional, and intellectual growth and development (Freedman, 1993; McLoyd, 1990; Pittman & Wright, 1991). The neighborhoods are often plagued by gang violence and the drug trade, which causes many parents to prohibit their children from playing outside, exchanging safety for physical, social, and emotional development opportunities (Osofsky, 1997). In high-crime environments, unsupervised, unstructured after-school time is at best unproductive for developing children, and at worst, dangerous.

One approach to fostering the healthy psychosocial development of urban children has been to provide supervised afterschool activities in safe, affordable settings (McLaughlin, Irby, &

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Langman, 1994; Roth, BrooksGunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Some of these are held in schools, others in churches or community agencies, and still others in youth development centers. These programs face several challenges in serving their target populations. One involves resources: they need an adequate space in which to operate, and a budget large enough to pay and train competent staff members, retain program supplies, and maintain facilities such as gyms or pools. Another involves attendance: a program can only hope to help those children who decide to spend time there. The subgroup of children who regularly attend afterschool programs generally shrinks in size with increasing age, as children entering their teens are faced with parttime jobs, family responsibilities, and the lure of the streets (McLaughlin et al., 1994).

The benefits of attending after-school programs for healthy child development are just beginning to be understood. Low-income children who spend their after-school time in supervised, nurturing settings have been found to have fewer socioemotional problems (Marshall et al., 1997). Some studies have found a moderate but positive effect on children's attitudes, behaviors, and competencies (Lerner, 1995; Pittman & Wright, 1991; Roth et al., 1998; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995), although no single program has been found to positively affect all dimensions of risk. Most of this research has assumed that the presence or absence of participation in after-school programs is the key to their success or failure; because of this, little is understood about the specific elements of a program that may make it successful along any particular dimension (Royse, 1998; Schinke, Orlandi, & Cole, 1992).

Youth development programs, which emphasize the provision of opportunities for growth and the presence of caring, stable adults, have been more successful in engaging children than efforts that target the prevention of specific problems, such as substance abuse or teenage sexual activity (Roth et al., 1998). The more positive youth development model removes the stigma that often characterizes programs based on a deficit model. Youth development programs also provide services to a greater number of children; since they are not designed to serve only those who have already exhibited problem behaviors, they can prevent a greater number of problems, and can enhance existing strengths (Dryfoos, 1990). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, in their 1991 report, called attention to the potential benefits of communitybased youth development organizations. Nationwide, several cities have launched efforts to increase the prevalence of such programs in economically disadvantaged communities (Wynn, 1995). But even though the benefits of youth development programs are beginning to be understood, the lack of rigorous research on the different elements of these programs makes it difficult to know where to focus the limited resources dedicated to improving the lives of impoverished youth.

While there is little research connecting elements of after-school programs to children's outcomes, there is a substantial literature on risk and protective factors for children in general, which can be applied to the more specific setting of youth development programs. This literature suggests that problems such as declining self-esteem for girls and externalizing behavior problems for boys are often mitigated when girls have access to supportive relationships with peers and adults, and when boys have access to structured activities and household rules (Block & Gjerde, 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Werner & Smith, 1982).

The patterns that are observed in primarily white middle-class samples may also hold true for black and Hispanic youth, although children of color face additional stress deriving from the tension between their cultural identities and those roles set out for them by the white majority. Structured activities and rules may reduce unhealthy externalization and behavior problems among black boys, as observed in white populations (Barrera & Reese, 1993). However, parental structure and family influence, either through the indirect transmission of

values and expectations or the direct supervision of risky evening and weekend free time, may be particularly salient for preventing delinquent behavior among Hispanic male youth (Pabron, 1998; Smith & Krohn, 1995). The sparsity of studies exploring links between minority youth's backgrounds and delinquent behavior is especially troubling, given the proportionally high rates of delinquency among both Hispanic and black males, relative to whites (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994; Pabron, 1998).

Among adolescent females, internalization of problems and declining self-esteem may not be as serious a problem among blacks as for whites, except perhaps among those girls who are struggling to fit in to a white middle-class definition of success and acceptability (Fordham, 1993; Robinson & Ward, 1991). The manifestation of depression and low self-esteem through internalization is more common among Hispanic adolescent girls, who also have higher depression rates than blacks or whites (Inclan & Herron, 1989; Ramirez, 1989). However, in some populations sexual and aggressive acting-out resulting from stress and depression occur as often as withdrawal (Inclan & Herron, 1989; Pesa, Cowdery, Westerfield, & Wang, 1997). Caring and relationships seem to play an important role in black and Hispanic adolescent girls' development, particularly bonds with female extended family members and especially in economically disadvantaged communities (Rhodes & Davis, 1996; Robinson & Ward, 1991; Ward, 1995).

Our study is an attempt to learn more about the ways in which afterschool time spent in youth development programs can have a positive impact on children's psychosocial functioning. This may be accomplished through providing some of the contact with caring adults and structured, supervised activities that have demonstrated protective potential. We focused on one particular youth development organization, a regional affiliate of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). The BGCA is one of the largest and oldest youth service organizations in the nation, focused on providing youth development opportunities to low income children and adolescents. Founded in 1902, the BGCA currently operates over two thousand neighborhood clubs across the country, serving 2,800,000 children and teenagers, 71% of whom reside in low income urban areas. The clubs' intent is to foster healthy development among youth by providing a safe environment in which to learn skills, enjoy recreational activities, and form positive bonds with peers and with caring adults.

Youth development programs serving different populations need to consider distinct sets of issues in deciding what services to offer their members in the hopes of providing the most positive opportunities for growth. There may be an important gender-based distinction between the impact of forming supportive relationships with others and that of enjoying challenging, structured activities. But much of what we know about protective elements of young people's lives comes from research on home or school environments; much less is understood about how these principles might extend to an after-school setting. In addition, the distinctions between the experiences of disadvantaged youth, and those of Hispanic and black youth, need to be teased apart from the bulk of the literature that exists on white, middle-class children and adolescents. The need for research on minority and low-income children is particularly critical when considering after-school programs such as inner-city Boys and Girls Clubs, the majority of whose populations do not come from the white middle-class.

For these reasons, this study set out to understand the differences between higher and lowerfunctioning black and Hispanic children who attend their neighborhood Boys and Girls Clubs. Specifically, we asked the following question: What elements of the club experience contribute to positive psychosocial functioning for youth of different ages, genders, and races?

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Our study was undertaken at the request of the Boys and Girls Clubs in a major urban center, as part of an effort to study the extent of gender equity within youth programs and staff administration. All of the parents of youth aged 10 or older at each of the four participating clubs were sent letters requesting permission to survey their children for this study. All children between the ages of 10–18 years who were present at each club over the course of four visits during a two-week period were given an opportunity to participate in the study by completing a three-page survey. Of the 306 eligible children approached, a total of 300 (98%) children agreed to participate. The four children who were from Caucasian backgrounds were excluded from the study, leaving a current sample of 296 children. The sample had the following characteristics: median age of 13.38 years (*SD* = 2.76), 41% female, 68% black and 32% Hispanic, and 79% receiving free lunch at school.

Measures

Child Functioning Variables—Three variables were used to measure child functioning. Table I shows the overall means for the Child Functioning variables in the sample. *Self esteem* was measured from the single item children selected from four options as best describing themselves: (a) ‘I am very talented and will be very successful’; (b) ‘I have some things going for me and will do okay’; (c) ‘I have trouble in many things and won’t do too much with myself’; and (d) ‘I don’t have anything special about me and won’t be very successful’. *Psychosocial functioning* was measured from the brief form of the Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PSC), answered on a 3-point Likert scale, that assessed the extent to which children experienced individual emotional or behavioral symptoms. For each item, children reported whether it was “never,” “sometimes,” or “often” present, scored 0, 1, and 2, respectively. The validity of the PSC has been demonstrated with school-age and minority populations (Jellinek et al., 1999) and the brief form of the PSC has recently been validated in a nationally representative sample (Gardner et al., 1999). The extent to which children had problems getting into *Trouble* was measured a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘no problem’ (5) to ‘very big problem’ (1). A high score on the global self-esteem measure indicated higher functioning whereas a high score on the scales *Psychosocial Functioning* and *Trouble* indicated worse functioning.

Club Participation and Experience Variables—Two items were used to assess levels of Club Participation. Children reported the average number of days within a week that they spent at the club as well as average number of hours per day spent at the club. Four variables were used to measure overall Club Experiences of the children, the overall means of which are shown in Table I. Children were asked how often they enjoyed themselves at the club and how often they felt they were not treated well at the club, answering “always,” “often,” “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never.” If children reported that they “never” or “rarely” enjoyed the club, *Enjoyment at Club* as coded as 0, and as 1 for responses of “sometimes,” “often,” or “always.” If children reported that they “always” or “often” felt that they were not treated well at the club, *Treatment at Club* was coded as 0, and as 1 for responses of “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never.” The importance of the *Activities* provided by the club in the lives of the children was assessed by the single item “I come to the club because of the activities here,” scored 0 for “no,” and 1 for “yes.” The importance of the club staff in the lives of the children was evaluated with the variable *Club Staff*. If children reported that they attended the club because they felt “more comfortable with adults at the club than with those at school” or if they reported that they attended the club “because of the staff here,” *Club Staff* was coded as 1. It was coded as 0 if children endorsed neither of these two items.

Analysis Strategy

Two-tailed Pearson correlations were conducted to evaluate individual relationships between child functioning and club experience variables. Differences among demographic groups on the child functioning and club experience variables were examined using chi-square analyses and Oneway Analysis of Variance tests. Mean levels of child functioning variables were examined among levels of club experience variables and demographic groups (race, age, and gender) using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) procedures. MANOVA models accounted for main and interaction effects among club experience variables and demographic factors, with club site and daily and weekly participation levels used as covariates, in order to control for club site effects and participation influences.

RESULTS

Correlations Between Child Functioning and Club Experience Variables

Table I shows the correlations between child functioning and club experience variables. Intracorrelations among child functioning variables were significant but modest in expected directions. Modest to low intracorrelations were found between *Activities* and *Club Staff* and *Weekly Participation, Enjoyment at Club* and *Daily Participation*. This indicates the distinctiveness of the measures, with the exception of *Weekly Participation* and *Daily Participation* which demonstrated a stronger relationship, $r = .40$. The only significant intercorrelations were found between *Enjoyment at Club* and *Self Esteem,* $r = .23$.

Child Functioning and Club Experience Variables Among Demographic Groups

Table II shows levels of child functioning and club experience variables among age, race, and gender groups. The only significant difference found among age groups were higher levels of psychosocial symptoms among younger children ($M = 9.66$, $SD = 4.90$) in comparison to older children ($M = 7.66$, $SD = 5.52$), $F = 10.60$, $p < .01$. With regards to race, black children reported significantly higher levels of self esteem ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .70$) in comparison to Hispanic children ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .80$), $F = 21.77$, $p < .001$, and mentioned club staff as important to their club attendance more frequently than Hispanic children (60% vs 46%), $X^2 = 4.68$, $p < .05$. With regards to gender, girls reported higher levels of self esteem ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .74$) than boys ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .83$), $F = 5.39$, $p < .05$, fewer problems getting into trouble ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .93$) than their male peers ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.26$), $F = 11.23$, $p < .001$, and mentioned club staff as important to their club attendance more frequently than boys (60% vs 48%), $X^2 = 9.50$, $p < .01$.

Club Experiences and Child Functioning Levels Among Demographic Groups

Enjoyment at Club—Examining child functioning levels within *Enjoyment at Club* and demographic groups revealed significant multivariate interaction trends with sex, $F(3,270) = 1.93$, $p < .10$, and age $F(3, 270) = 2.31$, $p < .10$. Univariate findings revealed the interaction effect for sex was significant only for *Psychosocial Functioning,* $F(1,272) = 5.17$, $p < .05$. Neuman-Keuls tests indicated that girls who never or rarely enjoyed the club had significantly higher levels of psychosocial symptoms ($M = 12.17$, $SD = 5.43$) than girls who sometimes, often, or always enjoyed the club ($M = 8.16$, $SD = 4.79$), $F(1) = 4.21$, $p < .05$. The interaction effect for age was explained by univariate findings for *Trouble,* $F(1, 272) = 5.82$, $p < .05$. Neuman-Keuls tests revealed that older children who never or rarely enjoyed the club reported significantly more problems getting into trouble ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.42$) than older children who enjoyed the club ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1) = 2.39$, $p < .05$.

Treatment at Club—Examining child functioning levels within *Treatment at Club* and demographic groups revealed a significant multivariate *Treatment at Club* main effect, $F(3,$

270) = 4.68, $p < .01$, and a significant *Treatment at Club* by sex by race interaction, $F(3, 270) = 3.14$, $p < .05$. Univariate findings revealed the main effect was significant for *Psychosocial Functioning,* $F(1, 272) = 10.41$, $p < .001$, indicating higher psychosocial symptoms among children who reported always or often feeling badly treated ($M = 10.18$, $SD = 5.50$) than among other children ($M = 7.53$, $SD = 4.96$). Univariate findings revealed the triple interaction effect was also significant for *Psychosocial Functioning,* $F(1, 272) = 3.14$, $p < .05$. Neuman-Keuls tests revealed that black boys who did not report being treated badly reported significantly lower psychosocial symptoms ($M = 6.25$, $SD = 5.12$) in comparison with peers wtilh negative treatment experiences (black boys $M = 10.89$, $SD = 5.88$), $F(1) = 5.42$, $p < .05$, (Hispanic boys $M = 9.51$, $SD = 5.10$), $F(1) = 5.21$, $p < .05$, (black girls $M = 8.96$, $SD = 4.67$), $F(1) = 4.50$, $p < .05$, (Hispanic girls $M = 10.60$, $SD = 6.92$), $F(1) = 5.64$, $p < .05$.

Activities—Examining child functioning levels within *Activities* and demographic groups revealed multivariate *Activities* effects with sex, $F(3, 270) = 3.04$, $p < .05$, and sex by age, $F(3, 270) = 3.52$, $p < .05$. Univariate findings for the *Activities* by sex interaction were found for *Self-Esteem,* $F(1, 272) = 4.49$, $p < .05$, and follow-up analyses showed significantly lower self-esteem scores among boys who did not mention activities ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .81$) than among girls who did not mention activities ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .48$), $F(1) = 7.31$, $p < .01$. Univariate findings for the triple interaction effect were significant for *Trouble,* $F(1, 272) = 10.12$, $p < .01$. Neuman-Keuls tests showed that older boys who did not mention activities had significantly more problems getting into trouble than older boys who mentioned activities ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.21$), $F(1) = 2.98$, $p < .05$, as well as both older girls ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .92$), $F(1) = 3.22$, $p < .05$ and younger girls ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.09$) $F(1) = 3.50$, $p < .05$, who mentioned activities as a reason for club participation.

Club Staff—Examining child functioning levels within *Club Staff* and demographic groups revealed significant multivariate *Club Staff* interactions with race, $F(3, 270) = 3.17$, $p < .05$, and age by sex, $F(3, 270) = 3.39$, $p < .05$. Univariate findings for the race interaction effect were significant for *Trouble,* $F(1, 272) = 5.55$, $p < .05$. Neuman-Keuls analyses showed that Hispanic children who did not mention club staff reported significantly more problems getting into trouble ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.42$) than Hispanic children who mentioned club staff ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .95$), $F(1) = 3.42$, $p < .05$, black children who mentioned club staff ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.11$), $F(1) = 3.02$, $p < .05$, and black children who did not mention club staff ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.09$), $F(1) = 3.24$, $p < .05$. Univariate findings for the triple interaction effect were significant for *Self-Esteem,* $F(1, 272) = 3.47$, $p < .05$, and *Trouble,* $F(1, 272) = 3.77$, $p < .05$. Follow-up analyses revealed that younger boys who did not mention club staff had significantly lower levels of self-esteem ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .87$) than younger boys who mentioned club staff ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .94$), $F(1) = 3.14$, $p < .05$, and older girls who mentioned club staff ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .51$), $F(1) = 34.02$, $p < .05$. Follow-up analyses for the univariate *Club Staff* by age by sex finding for *Trouble* revealed that older boys who did not mention club staff had significantly more problems getting into trouble ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.32$) than older boys who mentioned club staff ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.13$), $F(1) = 3.03$, $p < .05$, and younger girls who mentioned club staff ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .74$; $F(1) = 3.24$, $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

We tested some commonly-held assumptions about elements of children's lives that may protect them from negative outcomes. We extended this research to a relatively new setting, the after-school youth development program, instead of the better-understood home or school settings. We also examined these assumptions among low-income African-American and Hispanic children, a less-frequently studied population than the white middle-class.

We found evidence to support the recent efforts devoted to expanding the youth development model of after-school programming in economically disadvantaged communities. As we found no connection between frequency of attending the clubs and child outcomes, we examined the club experience in more detail, to learn about specific elements of the clubs which might relate to positive outcomes. The two core elements of the youth development model, providing opportunities for growth and the chance to form relationships with caring, stable adults, were linked with positive child functioning in a variety of ways.

In considering the influence of race and gender on club experience and child functioning, we found evidence to challenge some beliefs, established through research predominantly on white, middle-class populations, about the ways in which adjustment problems are manifested for low-income minority boys and for girls. Our findings of higher self-esteem among blacks than Hispanics contribute some support to previous studies' claims of lower self-esteem and greater psychological distress among Hispanics than blacks (Inclan & Herron, 1989). In addition, the boys in our sample had higher rates of getting into trouble than the girls, indicating that low income minority males may express socioemotional problems through externalized negative behaviors, as the literature suggests (Hetherington et al, 1982; Werner & Smith, 1982). The girls in our sample, however, reported self-esteem levels that were relatively high, did not decline with age, and were higher than the boys' self-esteem levels. These results differ markedly from the literature on white middle-class girls, whose self-esteem levels tend to decrease as they enter adolescence and are lower than those of their male peers (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). These findings suggest that low income minority females' socioemotional problems may manifest themselves differently than those of white middle-class females.

In terms of the specific relationships between child functioning and club experience variables in the present study, several patterns were revealed which have important implications for future research and the design of youth development programs. These will be discussed in terms of each club experience variable separately.

Club Staff

The potential benefits of relationships with nonkin adult support figures have been illustrated in the literature on risk and resiliency for children and adolescents (Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Rhodes & Davis, 1996; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992; Werner & Smith, 1982). The suitability of after-school program staff members for this type of supportive role is a key element of the youth development model's design, and is demonstrated by the present study's findings. Boys and Girls Club staff members were named by many children as contributing to their decision to attend the club in the afternoons, particularly by blacks as compared to Hispanics and by girls as compared to boys. This gender finding was expected, given the literature on the importance of relationship with supportive adults for minority, low-income girls. However, even though girls mentioned staff more often than boys, bonds with staff seemed to mediate older boys' getting into trouble and younger boys' self-esteem problems. Similarly, although fewer Hispanics mentioned staff members, behavior problems were worse among those Hispanic children who did not mention staff members than for any children who did.

Our findings are important in light of the high rates of delinquency among older Hispanic males. While the family has been identified as important in preventing Hispanic teenage boys from engaging in delinquent behaviors, few studies have consided the family more broadly, including extended family members and even nonkin adult support figures, such as Boys and Girls Club staff members. In environments characterized by high poverty and single-parent homes, these additional nonkin "family" members may be playing an

important and unrecognized role by motivating young males to spend their afternoons in a safe, enriching environment, providing support which contributes to higher self-esteem among younger boys, serving as role models, and providing guidance which reduces behavior problems among older boys.

Activities

The results relating to the activities available at the clubs also have implications for the prevention of negative outcomes for boys. The relationship between higher self-esteem, fewer behavior problems, and mentioning club activities among boys was also expected, as the literature indicates the benefits of structured activities in mediating challenges for boys (Block & Gjerde, 1986; Werner & Smith, 1992). However, club activities seem to be particularly salient for boys in our sample: while boys' self-esteem was lower overall than girls' in our sample, the gap was even greater among children who didn't mention activities as a reason for attending the club.

For older boys in particular, mentioning activities as a reason for coming to the club was associated with fewer problems getting into trouble. For girls, however, there were no connections between well-being and mentioning club activities. This could indicate an absence of activities at the clubs which stimulate, interest, and engage girls (Hirsch et al., 2000). Finding ways for the clubs to continue providing activities that engage boys may be crucial to their development. Similarly, identifying reasons why club activities do not have the same impact on girls may have important implications for their well-being.

Enjoyment and Treatment at the Club

In addition to the presence of caring adult staff members and the opportunity to participate in activities, children's perception of the atmosphere at the Boys and Girls Clubs was linked to well-being. Enjoyment of the club related to better psychosocial functioning for girls and fewer behavior problems for older children. Not feeling badly treated at the club related to better psychosocial functioning for children overall, particularly for black boys. The youth development model of after-school programming may be more successful in engaging children's interest and fostering positive behaviors than other models (Dryfoos, 1990; Roth et al, 1998) because it eliminates the pejorative problem-oriented approach and includes opportunities for growth along many dimensions. In so doing, youth development programs are able to create environments in which children feel safer and more comfortable—better able to enjoy themselves and to feel like they are treated well.

The next step in this line of research appears to be exploring the areas of program design that children enjoy and the particular elements of their experiences that cause them to feel poorly treated. This will aid in the design of future programs which create positive environments that contribute to healthy outcomes. These particular results suggest the importance of considering not only the practical skills and exposure to positive role-models that programs can provide to inner-city children, but also the less tangible elements of an after-school setting that can also contribute in important ways to children's well-being.

CONCLUSION

We identified several interactions between club experience variables and child functioning. These relate to our initial goal of understanding the ways in which youth development programs can impact the development of inner-city, minority children, and the specific elements of these programs that have importance for different age, gender, and race groups. They enable us to make informed suggestions for future program design and research efforts in this area.

There are several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results of our study. First, these data are cross-sectional; therefore, relationships between the child functioning and the club experience variables cannot be interpreted in terms of causation. Future studies should employ longitudinal methods in order to address this issue. Second, children that attend the four Boys and Girls Clubs we investigated may not be representative of their community populations. However, levels of psychosocial problems in the current sample are comparable to those found in other minority, low-income samples (Murphy, Arnett, Jellinek, Bishop, & Reede, 1992; Murphy & Jellinek, 1988), suggesting that children attending these Boys and Girls Clubs were not better-adjusted than non-attending populations.

The third limitation of our study is its reliance on child self-report. Future research should ameliorate this by incorporating parent, club staff member, and teacher ratings of child outcomes in addition to the children's reports. Fourth, there may be a self-selection bias inherent in several of the linkages reported. For example, children who have high levels of psychosocial problems may create disturbances in club settings which in turn require disciplinary actions by club staff, thereby causing the children to feel that they are badly treated. However, the finding that these children tend to feel badly treated at the club may also imply that negative interactions in the club compound their maladjustment.

These limitations notwithstanding, several of the results of our study have important implications for future research and program design. In particular, the two central features of the youth development program, relationships with club staff members and participation in club activities, were linked to several aspects of child functioning, particularly for the high-risk group of older males. For this reason, attention should be paid to the resource issue that faces these programs. First, changes in salary, training, and hiring practices may be needed to enable the formation of strong, longer-term bonds between staff and the children attending the clubs. Second, resources may need to be devoted to the design and maintenance of structured activities that engage the interest of children. In addition, future research on these aspects of children's after-school experiences are needed to explain the striking drop-off rate in youth program participation that occurs as children progress through adolescence. What elements of the club environment make it enjoyable and positive for children, and how does their experience of these elements change as they grow older?

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Table I

Correlations and Means of Child Functioning and Club Experience Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
Child functioning variables									
1. Global self-esteem	—	−.37**	.18*	.23**	.01	.02	.08	.09	.00
2. Psychosocial functioning	—	—	−.37**	.00	−.14	−.05	−.01	.07	.01
3. Trouble	—	—	—	.05	.05	.03	.09	−.09	.09
Club experience variables									
4. Enjoyment at club	—	—	—	—	−.04	.07	.10	.14	.15*
5. Treatment at club	—	—	—	—	—	.04	−.01	−.01	.07
6. Activities	—	—	—	—	—	—	.25**	.16*	.15
7. Club staff	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.08	−.01
8. Weekly participation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.40**
9. Daily participation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
M	3.38	8.61	3.87	.94	.82	.81	.55	3.95	2.64
SD	(.81)	(5.35)	(1.16)	(.24)	(.38)	(.39)	(.49)	(1.29)	(.57)

* $p < .01$.

** $p < .001$.

Table II

Child Functioning and Club Experience Variables Among Age, Race, and Gender Groups

		Age group		Race		Gender	
	Total sample	**10–12 yrs**	**13–18 yrs**	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Male**	**Female**
	N = 296 (100)	*N* = 136 (46)	*N* = 160 (54)	*N* = 201 (68)	*N* = 95 (32)	*N* = 175 (59)	*N* = 121 (41)
Child functioning							
Global self-esteem	*M* = 3.38	*M* = 3.31	*M* = 3.48	*M* = 3.55	*M* = 3.09***	*M* = 3.31*	*M* = 3.53
	SD = .81	*SD* = .86	*SD* = .74	*SD* = .70	*SD* = .80	*SD* = .83	*SD* = .74
Psychosocial functioning	*M* = 8.60	*M* = 9.66**	*M* = 7.65	*M* = 8.36	*M* = 8.99	*M* = 8.71	*M* = 8.36
	SD = 5.35	*SD* = 4.90	*M* = 5.52	*SD* = 5.31	*SD* = 5.37	*SD* = 5.64	*SD* = 4.86
Problems getting into trouble	*M* = 3.87	*M* = 3.90	*M* = 3.84	*M* = 3.90	*M* = 3.81	*M* = 3.67***	*M* = 4.17
	SD = 1.16	*SD* = 1.10	*SD* = 1.21	*SD* = 1.10	*SD* = 1.29	*SD* = 1.26	*SD* = .93
Club experience variables							
Enjoyment at club	*M* = 3.91	*M* = 4.03	*M* = 3.84	*M* = 3.88	*M* = 4.02	*M* = 3.89	*M* = 3.97
	SD = 1.01	*SD* = 1.00	*SD* = 1.02	*SD* = 1.01	*SD* = 1.01	*SD* = 1.01	*SD* = 1.01
Not treated well at club	*M* = 2.20	*M* = 2.25	*M* = 2.14	*M* = 2.29	*M* = 1.98	*M* = 2.29	*M* = 2.04
	SD = 1.31	*SD* = 1.32	*SD* = 1.31	*SD* = 1.31	*SD* = 1.30	*SD* = 1.31	*SD* = 1.30
Club activities							
No	58 (20)	27 (20)	31 (19)	43 (21)	15 (16)	36 (21)	22 (18)
Yes	238 (80)	109 (80)	129 (81)	158 (79)	80 (84)	139 (79)	99 (82)
Club staff							
No	134 (45)	52 (38)	80 (50)	81 (40)	51 (54)	91 (52)	41 (34)
Yes	165 (55)	84 (61)	80 (50)	120 (60)*	44 (46)	84 (48)	80 (66)**

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.