

SPORT-BASED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE BEST
PRACTICES OF THREE PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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ABSTRACT

SPORTS-BASED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE BEST PRACTICES OF THREE PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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Sports-based youth development programs have used sports to teach essential life skills to participants. Programs designed for adolescent girls have an additional ambition of closing the gender gap that still exists in physical activity levels. The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of sports-based youth development programs worldwide that are designed specifically for adolescent females. The researcher compared program elements, lesson elements, and evaluation methods of each program with recommendations from the literature. The main instruments used for these comparisons were the published curricula of each organization. Results showed minimal variance in program elements but substantial differences in lesson elements and evaluation methods. The researcher recommended creating international standards for research-supported lesson elements and incorporating scientific measurements into the evaluation process of all sports-based youth development programs designed for adolescent girls.

Keywords: sports-based youth development, girls, after-school programs, positive youth development, physical activity

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

The health benefits of physical activity have been known for many years but the additional extracurricular benefits of sport participation, especially for females, is a relatively new discovery (Stevenson, 2010). The formal effort to include more females in athletics started in 1972 with the passage of Title IX, which prohibited the discrimination of female athletes particularly in high school and college. Before Title IX, 1 in 27 females participated in sport and today 1 in 3 are active in a sport experience (Tucker Center, 2007). However, the rigor and longevity of this participation is dramatically less than males, as females are half as likely as males to participate in sport during adolescence (Tucker Center). After widespread inclusion of females in high school athletics, females have seen higher educational achievement, greater lifetime earnings, higher labor force participation, and have achieved higher job status in their respective professions (Stevenson). Sport organizations are now looking to promote more of these achievements through programs that encourage psychological, emotional, social, and intellectual growth (Gabriel, DeBate, High, & Racine, 2011).

Sports-based youth development programs seek to amplify all the benefits that physical activity inspires. These organizations, also known as development-focused youth sport (DYS) programs, utilize sport as an instrument to create the physical, psychological, and social assets needed to be a well-rounded individual (Gabriel et al., 2011). Sport programs that focus on life-skills and leadership development help combat

prevalent issues like childhood obesity and media-influenced body image dissatisfaction that plague adolescents, especially girls.

In order to harness the positive benefits of sport participation, organizations must understand what motivates girls to participate in physical activity. Young girls have unique needs that are not being catered to in the current physical education curriculum (Tucker Center, 2007). The existence of this gender gap in sport participation is in part due to the fact that physical education program designs cater to boys' needs rather than girls'.

The missing girl-focused PE curriculum can be supplemented, however, by after school programming. Many after school programs for girls and boys focus on athletics, leadership, or both, but few are designed specifically for girls. Markowitz (2010) noted that most of the research on girls' sports participation has focused on sport-only programs and there is a serious need for empirical research that measures the effects of sports-based youth development programs designed for girls.

Research on sports-based youth development contains recommendations from industry experts on the necessary components of positive youth development programs. The purpose of this study was to create a systematic approach used to evaluate the elements, goals, and outcomes of these organizations. This study used recommendations found in the literature to evaluate the best practices of three large-scale positive youth development sport programs designed for girls.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy

Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: EBSCOhost Business Source Premier, Dissertations & Theses Full Text: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection, Psychology of Women Quarterly, EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier, and ERIC. This review examined the current state of adolescent girls' physical activity practices, the need to supplement for missing criteria in physical education classes, and how sports-based youth development programs has empowered young girls to sustain life-long physical activity.

There is a wealth of knowledge about the benefits girls garner from sport participation, but there is a dearth of information regarding outcomes of girl-specific sport-based youth development programs. The abundance of research on sport participation benefits occurred because Title IX offered researchers the ability to closely examine before and after effects of a sudden increase in girl sport participation. The research reviewed in this study highlighted the girl-specific benefits of physical activity and promoted the necessity of sports-based youth development programs designed for girls.

Title IX was an Educational Amendment added to the Civil Rights Act banning gender discrimination in any federally funded educational institution (Stevenson, 2010). To be compliant with the law, a school, primarily high schools and colleges, must have the same athletic participation rates for both genders. Since the legislation created perfectly organic control and treatment groups, measurable effects were abundant. Through economic modeling, Stevenson effectively showed that a 10-percentage point increase in girls' sport participation led to a increase of 1.9 percentage points in the

probability of being employed. The study estimated that Title IX legislation led to 40% increase in the overall employment rate of 25-34 year old women (Stevenson). In conclusion, sport participation makes women more likely to attain more education, participate in the labor market, and reach higher job status (Stevenson).

Although the percentage of high school athletic participants that are girls increased after Title IX, the number of girls participating in the recommended amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity is declining (Tucker Center, 2007). This statistic shows that girls are participating in physical activity more than they used to but are not necessarily gathering all of the benefits associated with increased participation. The presented research suggested reasons why girls are not participating enough in physical activity and how this trend can be changed for future generations.

Adolescence is a time when peer culture and gender roles of boys exude defiance while girls are absorbed into a “culture of compliance and conformity” (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 209). Most girls do not feel inherently comfortable in the sport experience and must step out of this culture of conformity and prescribed gender roles in order to gain confidence in physical activity (Markowitz, 2010; Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiche, & Clement-Guillotin, 2013). Girls are excluded from male-dominated sports and fall victim to the “triple crown of disadvantage” when it comes to physical activity (Tucker Center, 2007; Markowitz, 2010). This “triple crown” includes strict gendering practices, body dissatisfaction due to constant surveillance, and society-imposed constraints (Tucker Center).

The instinctive inclusion of boys, and exclusion of girls, in sports developed from the idea that boys are more equipped for physical activity because of biological

characteristics (Boiche, Plaza, Chalabaev, Guillet-Descas, & Sarrazin, 2014). This justification is unwarranted since sex only accounts for five percent of the variance in physical abilities (Eagly, 1995). The Tucker Center Report (2007) explains that, “gendering practices tend to promote limiting ideas of what behaviors are appropriate for girls; skill at sports and physical activity is not considered one of them,” (p. 49). If girls perceive a sport as belonging to a certain gender-sport stereotype, they are more likely to comply with this stereotype (Boiche et al., 2013; Chalabaev et al., 2013; Tucker Center). If this is the case, an individual is also more likely to drop out of playing this sport if they do not see it as “belonging” to their gender (Boiche et al.). These gender-sport stereotypes are significant during times of adolescence because it is “a time when both girls and boys start considering how they are ‘supposed’ to act as women or men, while others in their lives begin reacting to them in gendered ways” (Markowitz, 2010, p. 1). High participation in sports enables boys to perform better in motor skills and tasks involving speed after puberty (Chalabaev et al.). This could be a result of high participation rates of boys and should not serve as a justification for sport-related gender stereotypes and exclusion.

Even if girls are able to step out of prescribed gender roles, there are few female athlete role models that they can look toward for guidance, especially on positive body image. The professional female athletes featured in the news seem to serve as role models but they actually have considerable implications on young girls. Most of these popular female athletes are highlighted specifically for their good looks and are consequently overly sexualized in the media (Tucker Center, 2007). The sexualization used by the media promotes the goal of “keep[ing] girls in their place” and effectively limits

freethinking of girls across the world (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 1). With these media images and messages bombarding young girls, it is no surprise that body dissatisfaction acts as another barrier to entry for girls into sport and lifelong physical activity (Tucker Center). Participation in sport, however, offers the opportunity to buffer the potential sexual objectification of girls (Boiche et al., 2013).

Girls learn from an early age that their power stems from physical appearance and by enhancing this they can increase popularity with peers (Adler & Adler, 1998). Predictably, no age group is more focused on their bodies and appearance than adolescent girls (Tucker Center, 2007). Young girls may also start to feel personal inadequacies if they are unable to correctly critique media messages – a process some experts refer to as media literacy training (Tucker Center; Markowitz, 2010). The media bombards adolescent girls with images of what the ideal female looks like, and most of the time, it is what the ideal white female looks like. Studies have shown that black girls typically have higher global self-esteem than white girls (Markowitz). Among high school students, 22% of white, 30% of Hispanic, and 58% of black girls felt “happy as I am” (Markowitz). Even though black girls may have higher self-esteem and higher abilities to disregard media messages, the feeling of body dissatisfaction persists across all types of girls.

The final disadvantage of this “triple-crown” facing adolescent girls is lack of privilege due to feeling limited or constrained. Much of these feelings come from the format of physical education classes that favor boys over girls (Tucker Center, 2007; Chalabaev et al., 2013). The curriculum content not only make girls feel less physically competent than boys but also guarantees that many girls will fail to connect with physical

activity (Tucker Center; Chalabaev et al.). Boys are typically associated with sports that are played in physical education classes while other sports that girls typically see themselves doing are rarely emphasized. Girls may need to focus more on skills mastery lessons while many physical education teachers choose to include maximum time for team sport tournaments (Tucker Center; Kirby, Levin, & Inchley, 2012). Unfortunately, these feelings of incompetency and inferiority can result in a life-long aversion to physical activity (Tucker Center; Kirby, et al.). Luckily, extracurricular programs exist that foster girl-focused environments dedicated to promoting life-long excellence in physical activity, among other things.

These programs embody positive youth development, which “refers to a perspective that considers youth as assets or resources to be developed, rather than as problems to be fixed or managed” (Markowitz, 2010, p. 8). Sports-based youth development programs embody this philosophy but uniquely choose sport as the primary instrument to develop the resources. These programs explicitly state that the sport skill is a secondary goal to life skills being learned (Perkins & Noam, 2007). Women Win, an International gender equity sport-focused organization, defines life skills as communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills, and coping and self-management (Murray & Matuska, n.d.). Perkins and Noam contend that successful positive youth development programs do three things: nurture positive relationships, identify specific knowledge, and provide tailored experiences to individuals.

One specific study, Waldron (2009), identified and compared the effects of life skills taught through Girl Scouts, a youth soccer program, and Girls on Track (a sports-

based youth development program). Girls Scouts is considered a life skills only program, the soccer program is sport only, and Girls on Track is a hybrid of the two programs. Only Girls on Track provided direct instruction on both life skills and sport. Waldron (2009) conducted interviews and asked specifically about four life skill components: interpersonal communication/human development, problem solving/decision making, identity development, and physical fitness/health maintenance. The only program participants that communicated learning specifics about all of the categories were those of Girls on Track (Waldron). Therefore, the researcher concluded, “there is evidence to suggest that the Girls on Track program may be more successful in delivering these life skills than the other two programs” that keep separate the activity and the teaching of life skills (Waldron, p. 73).

These sports-based youth development programs have the ability to correct the gender gap in physical activity and equip girls with needed life skills to succeed in today’s world (Perkins & Noam, 2007; Murray & Matuska, n.d.; Taylor, 2012). These girl-specific programs could offset physical education classes that ignore the unique psychological needs of girls (Markowitz, 2010). For example, it is suggested that programs should directly address how girls feel about their bodies, how their bodies are portrayed in the media, how they feel about physical activity, and if they feel that physical activity gives them increased confidence (Tucker Center, 2007). In order to be an effective organization, these programs must train their coaches and staff on how to mentor young people (Tucker Center). Ewing, Seefeldt, and Brown (1996) found that 90% of youth sport coaches have no formal training in youth development, which explains the need for not only educated coaches but also development focused programs

to offset what youth are missing in physical education classes at school.

Sports-based youth development programs have the ability to change the current state of young girls and physical activity (Murray & Matuska, n.d.; Tucker Center, 2007). Even though one in three girls today are active through sport, only one third of these girls barely meet the minimal physical activity standards and another third are completely sedentary (Tucker Center). Teaching girls how to feel physically competent and how to have control over their own bodies will encourage girls to include exercise as a life long activity (Tucker Center; Chalabaev et al., 2013). Waldron (2009) found that the only program in her study to explicitly teach girls how to assert control over their bodies was Girls on Track. The participants noted having greater identity, greater acceptance of self, and greater understanding of their bodies (Waldron). These programs have the power to alter current trends and empower the next generation of females (Murray & Matuska, n.d.).

For these programs to be completely successful, however, they must also include formal leadership instruction and sustained involvement in leading activities (Taylor, 2012). He explained that although positive youth development programs involving sport have the great power to change girls, they are usually for too short a period of time. Girls who participated in sustained leadership practices and formal leadership lessons had higher global self-esteem than girls who did not (Taylor). This study is an example of how, by having the right requirements and training, positive youth development programs can effectively change the culture and current trends facing adolescent girls (Murray & Matuska, 2013; Tucker Center, 2007).

In order to create gender equity in adolescent physical activity, the literature

advocated for changed attitudes and alterations to how girls learn about sports. Girls must learn how to synthesize, and be critical of, mass media's "ideal" body message (Markowitz, 2010; Tucker Center, 2007). Adolescent leadership and life-skill programs can equip girls with these necessary skills and competencies needed to meet the challenges that adolescence prompts (Taylor, 2012).

It is imperative, however, that these programs are effectively evaluated and maintained. Markowitz (2010) noted that most of the research on girls' sports participation has been conducted on organized sport programs, and not on sports-based youth development programs, and especially not on girls-only programs. More empirical research is needed to measure the effects of programs that intentionally teach life-skills to adolescent girls (p. 26). Experts have outlined not only missing curriculum pieces but have also recommended key components that must be present in successful curriculums. This information was used to create a systematic approach to evaluate the effectiveness of programs that seek to promote not only physical activity but also leadership and life-skills to adolescent girls.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of sports-based youth development programs worldwide that are designed specifically for adolescent girls.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What evaluative methods do these programs use?
2. What are the programmatic elements of these organizations?
3. How do these organizations embody recommendations for sports-based youth development programs designed for females?
4. What are the systematic approaches used to evaluate these organizations?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of sports-based youth development programs worldwide that are designed specifically for adolescent girls. This chapter includes the following sections: description of context, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Context

The best practices of sports-based youth development programs designed for girls were evaluated for the following organizations: Girls on the Run, Goal Programme, and GoGirlGo!. Girls on the Run reached over 160,000 girls in 200 different communities throughout Canada and the United States in 2014 (Girls on the Run, 2014). The organization provides services for two age groups: 8-10 years old and 10-13 years old. Goal Programme was created in part by an international financial institution and spans five countries while serving over 18,500 girls aged 12-18 (Goal Programme, 2014). GoGirlGo! is an educational program in the United States that has reached almost one million school-aged girls (Women's Sport Foundation, 2011b).

These programs either created their own curriculum or utilized an outside source's curriculum designed specifically for youth programs. Girls on the Run is the only analyzed organization that created their curriculum independently. Goal Programme used three sources to create their curriculum: Women Win "an international centre of excellence on gender and sport" (Women Win, 2013, p. 9), Standard Chartered Banking

Institution (one of the creators of Goal Programme), and the Population Council (Goal Programme, 2014). Conversely, GoGirlGo! adopted a curriculum created by the Women's Sport Foundation, a United States based organization started by Billie Jean King in 1974 (Women's Sport Foundation, 2011a). Women's Sport Foundation created a program curriculum for underserved girls to gain access to physical activity through a grant program that communities can apply for (Women's Sport Foundation). These organizations were chosen for the study because they all have mission statements that aim to improve the health of girls, keep girls involved in lifelong physical activity, and support the holistic development of young girls.

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a best practices checklist developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The checklist contained required program components that were gathered through recommendations in the literature. The purpose of the checklist was to address the specific needs of adolescent girls that can be neglected in PE curricula and should be included in sports-based youth development programs. Based on recommendations from the literature, the researcher categorized the instrument into three sections: program elements, lesson elements, and evaluation elements. The instrument included: 10 program elements, 8 lesson elements, and 3 evaluation elements. The lesson element section was split up into three topics: body image, sexism and violence against women, and conflict resolution. Research indicated these lesson topics as imperative for girl-specific development programs.

The instrument was developed using the following sources: Tucker Center (2007), Taylor (2012), Perkins and Noam (2007), Women Win (n.d.), and Ewing, Seefeldt, and Brown (1996). The standards in the instrument were transcribed from recommendations in the literature to necessary elements in the best practices checklist. The researcher chose elements that were repeated in multiple sources, which signaled their importance.

A pilot study was conducted on the Adolescent Girls Empowerment Program, a girl-specific positive youth development program in Zambia. This program differs slightly from the organizations chosen for this study because the participants were not required to be in school. Also, the focus of the program was on health, leadership, and life skills but did not utilize sport instruction, unlike the chosen organizations (Population Council, 2013). For the purpose of the pilot study, however, this program was satisfactory. The main source for evaluation was the curricula of the designated programs. Information was gathered on how the programs evaluated themselves and which methods they used to measure their success. After completing the pilot study, the researcher changed the instrument elements from questions to statements. Extra space was added for notes about each element in order to include specific examples from the curricula. After examining the literature again, length of program was added to the desired program elements section because Taylor (2012) noted that longer programs had higher efficacy.

Description of Procedures

The researcher began to gather information on organizations during the time period of February 11th, 2015 to February 19th, 2015. These organizations were chosen

because they all provided downloadable curricula, as well as evaluation procedures. The organizations' websites provided the information needed to complete the instrument. There were two common ways to conduct evaluations: in-house or through an outside agency. Therefore, the researcher also utilized these published reports by outside agencies in order to analyze the evaluation process of all three organizations.

The instrument collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The sections of the checklist that listed program and lesson elements were qualitative in nature and required a notes section. For the evaluations section of the instrument, however, the researcher examined quantitative data from both the organization and outside research agencies. This information looked at how many different ways the program evaluated itself, how many different outside agencies had evaluated the program, and any quantitatively based information used to measure impact.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of sports-based youth development programs worldwide that are designed specifically for adolescent girls. A best practices approach was utilized to examine the curricula of three sports-based youth development programs designed for girls. This chapter includes the following sections: overview of selected organizations, program elements, lesson elements, and evaluation elements.

Overview of Selected Organizations

The best practices of sports-based youth development programs designed for girls were evaluated for the following organizations: Girls on the Run, Goal Programme, and GoGirlGo!. Girls on the Run reached over 160,000 girls in 200 different communities throughout Canada and the United States in 2014. The program was started in 1996 in Charlotte, North Carolina and expanded to Canada in 2000. Annually, the program served roughly 150,000 girls in 200+ community councils. The girls were split into two groups by age and grade: ages 8-10 (grades 3-5) and ages 10-13 (grades 6-8). The program utilized running to teach life and leadership skills and ended in a community 5k race after each season.

Goal Programme was an international program and served five countries: China, India, Jordan, Nigeria, and Zambia. The organization was started through the joint work of Standard Chartered (an international banking and financial company), The Population

Council, and Women Win (a international leader on gender equity and sport). The program has reached over 18,500 girls aged 12-18 since its establishment in 2006. The curricula were adapted to schools or extracurricular programs that aimed to empower young girls while promoting physical activity. The program did not teach a specific sport but instead focuses on using general physical activity to impart life skills.

GoGirlGo! was created through the Women's Sport Foundation and was applied to communities all over the United States through a grant program. The program launched in 2000 and served girls in elementary, middle, and high schools. The signature market was New York City but the program was utilized throughout the country. The curriculum only incorporated general physical activity but did offer an additional program curriculum for those interested in teaching tennis skills.

Program Elements

The researcher examined 10 different program elements for all three of the selected organizations. The only program that incorporated all 10 elements was Girls on the Run. GoGirlGo! did not have a published training program for the coaches, which was the only program element in the instrument that this organization did not possess. Goal Programme incorporated all of the desired elements on the instrument except for two: program goals did not explicitly state the goal of trying to create positive coach and peer relationships, and the program did not have any community partnerships that they listed.

All of these programs had extended program lengths but Goal Programme had the longest duration of 10 months. GoGirlGo! allowed for different duration adaptations of

the program but was initially designed to be implemented for 12 weeks. Similarly, Girls on the Run was also completed in 12 weeks.

Each of these programs had different ways of categorizing the life skills they believe lead to the holistic development of young girls. Girls on the Run addressed three classifications of issues facing adolescent girls: lack of identity, lack of connectedness, [and] powerless over one's life. Under these three classifications, there were 12 specific lesson topics including body image, nutrition, dating, and health relationships. The curriculum for GoGirlGo! programs utilized similar topics for its 12 week curriculum. Goal Programme, however, had four different major sections themes: be yourself, be healthy, be empowered, and be money savvy. The first three categories were similar to the other two programs but the money savvy module was unlike any other category included in curricula from other organizations.

Lesson Elements

Girls on the Run contained half of the recommended lesson elements from the instrument. The four missing items were the following: how the "ideal woman" does not exist, how to defend one's self against people, women's history or social justice, discussions on intersections of race, class, and gender. GoGirlGo! also did not teach about women's history and social justice. The only other lesson element that its curriculum was missing was not addressing the harmful effects of spreading rumors. Goal Programme's curriculum did not include two recommended elements: expose girls to strong female athletes and teach girls how to control anger and treat each other with

respect. Elements were considered missing if they were not explicitly stated in the curriculum.

Evaluation Methods

All three programs utilized questionnaires administered at least two times (pre- and post-program) and utilized the collected data to make conclusions about effectiveness of program. The organizations also had published formal evaluation reports available. Girls on the Run and Goal Programme contained detailed evaluation processes on their respective websites. GoGirlGo! had only been evaluated by outside researchers and these reports were found through two databases.

Girls on the Run and Goal Programme conducted in-house evaluations but there were also several scattered outside-sourced reports. This study focused on the evaluations completed through affiliated members of both organizations. One of the evaluations for GoGirlGo! examined the satisfaction of staff and not participants. The main recommendation from this study was to incorporate an interactive staff-training program. The other report analyzed participants of nine afterschool programs in which half the girls were overweight or obese, and the majority of girls were either black or Hispanic. The main finding from this study was that the program did not reach its goal of achieving 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity for the girls. Modifications were recommended to shorten discussion time and increase vigor of physical activities.

Girls on the Run has utilized the same evaluation processes since 2002, which were longitudinal quasi-experimental studies on council participants throughout the nation. In the latest published report, the study was conducted on 877 participants, which

was the largest sample size of all the organizations. The main finding of the original study in 2002 was that the created program curriculum prompted significant positive affects on self-esteem, eating attitudes and behaviors, and body size satisfaction.

Goal Programme did not publish any complete, formal studies but did present findings from one evaluation period. Echoing the mission of the financial institution that created the program, Goal Programme's curriculum was the only one to have a goal of increasing the financial intelligence of participants. The main findings showed that girls who completed the program were more likely to be able to count money correctly, own a bank or post office account, know more about the services available from a bank, and were more knowledgeable about unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. The evaluation process aimed to measure changes in knowledge, empowerment, and awareness but these were not present in the published report. Goal Programme's website had a very detailed account of how to conduct the program evaluations but they did not present any examples of completed evaluations on their own website. The only published report, which only focused on financial goals, was published through Standard Charter's website.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the best practices of sports-based youth development programs designed for girls and sought to assess evaluation methods. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications, limitations, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

Sports provide benefits to girls that are more far-reaching than just fitness level and physical health (Tucker Center, 2012). Even though more girls are participating in sport than ever before, there is still a need for improvement. The review of literature for this study discussed the various factors that have contributed to a severe gender gap in physical activity. A major contributing factor to the gender gap is poorly constructed physical education courses. Sports-based youth development programs designed for girls seek to mitigate gaps in physical education curricula, inspire life long physical activity, and develop leadership and life skills for young girls. Information gathered through this review assisted the researcher in creating the evaluation instrument, which in turned allowed for the examination of the best practices of three organizations.

The instrument used for evaluating the organizations was developed through recommendations found in the literature that outlined necessary program elements, lesson elements, and evaluation elements of positive youth development programs. The

instrument was then utilized to examine all of the programs' curricula, primarily through their websites. The curricula were reviewed during February 2015 and both qualitative and quantitative data were transcribed. Additional research was then collected from outside sources to evaluate the methods used for evaluations.

The results of the study indicated various differences between curricula, implementation, and evaluation methods of each organization. The three programs utilized most of the recommended program elements but differed in both lesson elements and evaluation processes. Lesson element recommendations from the literature were very specific. Therefore there was more variation between each organization in this section. The researcher found that evaluation methods varied the greatest between programs. Only one program utilized a scientific method to measure the programs impact on physical activity, which was a major goal for each organization.

Discussion

A finding of the study was that program elements were mostly consistent with the characteristics of positive youth development but the organizations categorized these elements differently. For example, when referring to body image and self-esteem, Girls on the Run named this element "Valuing What is Really Important" (Girls on the Run, 2014) while GoGirlGo! referred to it as "Feeling Good" and "Every Body is Beautiful" (Women's Sport Foundation, 2011b). Each program decided to highlight certain factors of the holistic development of young girls, based on the mission statement of that organization. Perkins and Noam (2007) declared that the participants of successful

positive youth development organizations should experience: positive relationships, gains in specific knowledge, and tailored experiences.

Goal Programme was the only organization that did not explicitly state a goal to nurture positive adult-to-youth and youth-to-peer relationships. This information was not embedded in the mission statement, goal outcomes, or curriculum of the organization's website, but that does not mean this element was not present in the Goal Programme experience. The program did, however, teach facilitators other appropriate skills through systematic standard-based coach education program. This training program was an important finding since only 10% of youth sport coaches had formal training in youth development (Ewing, Seefeldt, & Ewing, 1996).

The only examined organization that did not promote a formal coaches training was GoGirlGo!. The other two programs incorporated training sessions or a written "tool-kit", equipping teachers with information about how to guide the program. This lack of training had adverse effects for the GoGirlGo! program during evaluation reports. Dink, Huberty, and Beets (2014) administered a qualitative evaluation of GoGirlGo! staff members. One of the proposed suggestions from these staff members was for the organization to provide an interactive staff-training program. The same authors found that only 89% of the curriculum was completed during a spontaneous drop-in observation period (Huberty, Dink, & Beets, 2014). This finding led the researchers to suggest modifications for staff training that included creating a competency-based staff-training program. Other modifications were teaching facilitators how to maximize physical activity time and employ age-appropriate behavior management techniques. Since these

reports were published, GoGirlGo! has implemented some training activities but these are not available to all areas yet and have not been evaluated.

Researchers have found that sport can be a way to buffer the potential sexual objectification of girls (Boiche et al., 2013) and encourage girls to step out of prescribed gender roles that keep them from participating in physical activity (Tucker Center, 2007). Although all three organizations provided positive gender role modeling, GoGirlGo! exceeded baseline recommendations. The program encouraged females to be facilitators of the curriculum but guidelines also allowed for men to join. But, only if they “present an opportunity to model appropriate, respectful cross-sex interactions” and if the girl participants approve it (Women’s Sport Foundation, 2011b, p. 4). Additionally, each lesson started with a profile of a female athlete. Some chapters included real female athletes while others utilized one of four characters the program made up which “represent a cross section of ethnicity, body type, athletic ability, and able-bodied-ness” (Women’s Sports Foundation, p. 11). This is the type of gender role modeling is consistent with recommendations from the literature.

Markowitz (2010) urged programs to include opportunities for girls to experience the effects of “mattering”, which refers to allowing girls to engage in community events. There were two different ways the organizations approached this element. Girls on the Run and GoGirlGo! both held season-culminating events in the community that included physical activities and life skills practiced throughout the program. Girls on the Run also incorporated a community service event in its curriculum to be completed before the community 5k race. Goal Programme’s curriculum included time for the group to organize a public event that allowed the girls to make an impact on their communities.

Goal Programme's event did not necessarily include physical activity unlike the events for the other two organizations.

The second major finding was that there was substantial variance in lesson elements between programs. The lesson elements section included the following topics: body image, sexism and violence against women and girls, and conflict resolution. It was recommended that programs for adolescent girls should explicitly state that the "ideal" body does not exist and that girls must be trained in literacy training to be able to decode media's messages (Tucker Center, 2012; Markowitz, 2010). The only program that had no mention of the "ideal" body was Girls on the Run. All three programs did address the difference between "real beauty" and bodies found in the media but, according to the literature, Girls on the Run should have directed the lesson toward how the ideal body doesn't exist.

One element of the Girls on the Run lessons that stood out was the creation of "The Girl Box". According to the curriculum,

the girl box is the place where many girls go around middle school when they begin to morph into what they think they should be instead of being who they really are... the overarching theme comes from a culture rooted in the belief that girls and women must conform to a set of standards that are often unattainable and dangerous to our health and well-being (Girls on the Run Rochester, n.d., p. 1)

The Girl Box lesson explored ways that girls can positively cope with societal impositions and further established an honest peer-to-adult relationship. This was an example of how Girls on the Run incorporated not only body image but also gendering

practices, which was an important contributing factor to the gender gap that exists in physical activity.

The literature also suggested that positive youth development programs aimed at adolescent girls should include a section about sexism and violence against women and girls (Tucker Center, 2012; Markowitz, 2010; Murray & Matuska, n.d.). This research recommended that these programs teach the girls about self-defense, women's history, and social justice for all while addressing the intersections of race, class, and gender. The only program to embody all three of these elements was Goal Programme. Girls on the Run did teach about abusive relationships but did not address self-defense, women's history and social justice, or diversity. GoGirlGo! did not teach about women's history or social justice but did cover the other two elements. It was not specified at what age girls should learn these lessons, therefore the researcher hypothesized that the programs left out these lessons because they considered them to be too mature for their elementary and middle school aged participants (Murray & Matuska, n.d.).

Finally, the last finding of this study examined the various ways these organizations evaluated the programs. All three of the programs included the recommended elements but each chose different ways to track their impact. Girls on the Run adapted an evaluation process created by an outside researcher (Girls on the Run, 2014). The organization's website published four comprehensive reviews, from 2002 to 2011. The evaluation method measured the program's impact on self-esteem, commitment to physical activity, eating behaviors and attitudes, body image, and feelings of empowerment. The reports utilized a Likert-type questionnaire to conduct the pre-test and post-treatment tests on participants. The evaluations also incorporated Rosenberg's

Self-Esteem Scale, which was reported as one of the most valid global measures of self-esteem and found that self-esteem increased in newly and previously exposed participants and decreased in never exposed survey participants (Girls on the Run, 2014). The evaluations focused on the participants' feelings of physical activity but failed to measure the level of intensity and duration of physical activity attained by participants.

Goal Programme was started in part by Standard Chartered, a financial banking institution. The current methods of evaluation stayed true to the organization's heritage and measured the program's impact on the financial knowledge of the participants. The organization did not post any evaluation reports that presented all of the evaluation goals outlined in the company's website. For example, the website claimed that the Population Council created a survey to evaluate Goal Programme and measure the increase in knowledge about four key life skills, the increase in empowerment, and the increase in awareness of the value of girls in families and communities. This evaluation process consisted of three tools: participant baseline and endline survey, facilitator questionnaire and session template, and drawing sessions. The website directed visitors to an example of the independent assessment of the Goal Programme in India. The reported results, however, only presented the changes to the financial understanding of the girls. Although the program declared it was leading the way in measuring the impact of sport for development programs, it failed to publish measurements of its impact on the physical activity levels of adolescent girls.

GoGirlGo! provided an example of how to measure a program's impact on the physical activity levels of participants. An evaluative study analyzed nine afterschool programs that had adapted the curriculum (Huberty, Dink, & Beets, 2014). Data were

collected at the baseline, twice in the middle of the program, immediately following the program, and three months after the end of the program. The most important finding of the study showed that physical activity levels stayed constant from baseline to follow up. The researchers suggested that modifications be made to increase the time spent participating in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). GoGirlGo! explicitly stated a goal of helping girls achieve 60 minutes per day of MVPA activity and this evaluation showed that the current curriculum and facilitation failed to do that. The curriculum did, however, result in increased self-efficacy for physical activity and self-enjoyment. This evaluation method was the only one that utilized scientific methods to measure its impact on increasing physical activity levels.

The limitations of this study primarily stemmed from lack of time. There was limited time to collect recommendations from experts in the industry and this may have affected the results since only a handful of expert recommendations were included in the instrument. For example, Goal Programme utilized Women Win to create its curriculum, which also happened to be one of the organizations whose guidelines were from one of the few sources used to create the evaluation instrument for this study. Therefore, Goal Programme was more likely to contain the recommended elements in the instrument since they partnered with one of the sources used to create this study's evaluation instrument. If there was more time and more sources included in the instrument, there would be a smaller chance of overlap between program curriculum and instrument sources.

Secondly, there is also a chance that the published curricula do not accurately reflect what is taught during the actual implementation of the program. For example,

Huberty, Dink, and Beets (2014) found that 89% of curriculum material was taught in the GoGirlGo! meetings. This fact shows that program and lesson elements could not be reported with absolute certainty because that would require experiencing the program first-hand.

The study analyzed published curricula from sports-based youth development programs to assess how each program embodied recommendations from experts on positive youth development. The study showed that fundamentally, each program stayed true to the requirements of positive youth development. The programs tended to vary more in lesson elements and evaluation methods. The examined organizations existed all over the world and must be adapted to properly serve the participants, but it is important that these programs have a certain level of uniformity in the compositions of the programs. The researcher found that it was imperative for these organizations to use new evaluation methods to determine whether or not the programs achieved their stated goals and objectives.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Girls on the Run and Goal Programme utilized questionnaires as evaluation methods while GoGirlGo! utilized a mix of questionnaires and quantitative methods to measure time spent in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.
2. All three programs incorporated the following recommended sport based youth development program elements: specifications for adolescent girls, mattering, life skill and sport-related skill improvements, leadership activities,

gender mentors, community partnerships, adequate length of program, and gender practices.

3. The organizations embody the main recommendation for sports-based youth development explicitly stating that they offer physical activity as a way to develop life skills for young girls.
4. All three of these organizations primarily utilize questionnaires to evaluate the impact on girls.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Girl-focused sports-based youth development programs should include scientific instruments to measure the effect of physical activity to match recommendations of increase MVPA in adolescent girls.
2. Girl-focused sports-based youth development programs should increase vigor of physical activity in programs in order to increase time spent in MVPA.
3. Develop an international standard for lesson elements to facilitate uniform implementation of sports-based youth development programs designed for adolescent girls.
4. Researchers should complete a comparative study to measure the effectiveness (in raising physical activity and teaching life-skills) across programs that teach one sport versus programs that incorporate general physical activity.

5. All programs, no matter the geographic location or age group, should include lessons on social justice, diversity, and self-defense.
6. Program evaluations should include a mix of questionnaires for girls, questionnaires for staff, and scientific measurements to evaluate impacts of organizations.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

Agency Name

Program Elements

Notes

	☑ or ☒
Systematic standard-based coach education program	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>
Program outcome goal to nurture positive adult/youth and youth/peer relationships	
Targets specific knowledge, skills, competencies for adolescent girls	
Mattering: allows a girl to engage in community events	
Offers opportunities for like skills and sport-related skills to improve	
Opportunities to foster cultural competence	
Leadership activities available to girls	
Gender Mentors	
Community partnerships	
Length of program	
Addresses gender practices	

Lesson Elements

Notes

Body Image

- Ask girls about how the media portrays what the right “woman” looks like
- Has girls address fact that “ideal woman” doesn’t exist
- Exposes girls to strong female athletes

Sexism and violence against women and girls

- Provide girls with skills to defend themselves
- Teach about women’s history and social justice for all
- Explicitly addresses intersections of race, class, and gender.

Conflict Resolution

- Teaches girls how to control their anger and treat each other with respect
- Address the harmful effects of spreading rumors

or

Evaluation Elements

Notes

Track attendance

Collect data on participants

Conduct pre/post participant questionnaires

Formal evaluation report

or