

From Sidelines to Center Court:

Empowering Women Coaches and
Girls in Youth Sports

*A Regional Study in Southeast Michigan and
Western New York*

Letter from the CEO

For more than five decades, the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) has worked to break down barriers so that every girl — no matter her zip code — has the opportunity to play, lead, and thrive through sport. Yet our research continues to reveal a troubling truth; girls in underserved communities still face persistent barriers to participation. We know this challenge exists — but how does it play out at the community level? And what can we do to change it?

That is the driving force behind this report, *From Sidelines to Center Court: Empowering Women Coaches and Girls in Youth Sports*. Grounded in Southeast Michigan and Western New York, this hyperlocal research sheds light on how girls experience sport in their neighborhoods — and critically, who is (and is not) showing up to lead them.

We know girls benefit immensely from having women coaches. They see what is possible. They feel seen, supported, and empowered. But today, women still make up only about 28 percent of coaches on girls' teams — a number that has not budged in decades. If we want to keep girls in the game, we need to strengthen the coaching pipeline for women and dismantle the systemic barriers holding them back.

This report does more than diagnose a problem. It offers a blueprint for change. It explores the motivations, challenges, and opportunities that shape women's pathways into coaching, uncovering stories and strategies that local leaders can act on. While the data is drawn from two regions, the findings are nationally relevant — providing a roadmap for communities everywhere to build more inclusive, sustainable coaching ecosystems.

This project would not have been possible without the steadfast support of our generous funding partner, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. It also would not have been possible without the on-the-ground leadership of Dr. Renee Cadzow, Dr. Michele Lewis Watts, Dr. Ramona Cox, and Katie Joyce; the inclusion of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan; and the consulting support of Strength in Numbers. Together, this team brought deep local insight and academic rigor to a shared goal — ensuring more women have the support and resources to coach, lead, and inspire the next generation.

At WSF, we believe that every community holds the power to create lasting change — and that coaching is one of the most powerful tools we have to help girls unlock their full potential. We hope this report serves not only as a catalyst for action, but as a reminder: when women lead, girls rise.



Danette Leighton
CEO, Women's Sports Foundation

Acknowledgments

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About the Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation® (WSF®) exists to enable girls and women to reach their potential in sport and life. We are an ally, an advocate, and a catalyst for tomorrow's leaders. Founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, we are one of the first organizations to recognize the powerful connection between sport access, equity, and society. For 50 years and counting, WSF has been changing the game through its research, advocacy, and community programming, investing over \$100 million to help girls and women play, compete, and lead — in sports and beyond — without barriers. A leader and champion of the entire women's sports ecosystem, WSF amplifies the vital societal and cultural impact that is made when girls and women play sports. When girls play, they lead, and we all win!™ To learn more about the Women's Sports Foundation, please visit www.WomensSportsFoundation.org.

About the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his beloved Buffalo Bills NFL team. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson provided that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation that bears his name. Based in Detroit, the Foundation began with a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson's desire for the Foundation's impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable, and overseen by those who knew him best. For more information, visit www.rcwjrf.org.



RALPH C. WILSON, JR.
FOUNDATION

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Executive Summary

While existing literature and research describes many of the barriers girls face in playing sports as well as the consequences of those barriers, a more nuanced understanding of the nature and causes of the barriers is less known. Additionally, given the importance to girls of female role models in sports, understanding the barriers to coaching among women can not only provide support to women in these leadership roles but also support girls who might be more inclined to play if there were more women role models engaged in coaching capacities.

To close this gap in research, Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) conducted a three-year research initiative funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation focused on addressing access, engagement, and retention in sports for girls and communities across the region as well as the lack of women coaches in the youth sports space. The research initiative includes four phases: 1) literature review, 2) qualitative research, 3) survey research, and 4) dissemination of information for strategic planning. The main focus of this report is the survey research.

The survey was designed by Strength in Numbers Consulting Group (SiNCG) and Women's Sports Foundation. The literature review and findings from the qualitative research informed the development of the survey. The main research questions addressed in this phase of research include:

Women Coaches in Youth Sports:

- What are the benefits of coaching (e.g., mentorship of younger people, community connectedness) that could be promoted, reinforced, or amplified to encourage participation and retention of women in coaching? Does this vary by race (POC vs. not) or coach status (current coach vs. former coach)?
- What are the barriers to coaching (e.g., not feeling confident or skilled) and negative events that affect participation in coaching?
- What are the facilitators and barriers that affect intention to coach a sport in the next 12 months?
- How much training have coaches experienced? How much and what kind of coaching training do they want?
- What do coaches and prospective coaches believe about the gender-specific needs of girls in coaching?

Girls in Sports:

- Which psychosocial characteristics of girls (e.g., competitiveness and identity as an athlete) could be promoted, reinforced, or amplified to encourage participation and retention in sports? Does this vary by race (POC vs. not), age (12–14 vs. 15–17), or participation in sports (currently vs. not currently playing sports)?
- How do girls' experiences in general and gender-specific experiences (e.g., feeling that coaches understand specific needs of girls, experiences of teasing) associate with race (POC vs. not), age (12–14 vs. 15–17), or participation in sports (currently vs. not currently playing sports)?
- What is the role of encouragement from influential adults and parents/guardians in influencing girls' participation in sports?

Two surveys were administered: one by coaches and those interested in coaching and one by girls who have played organized sports and those who have not. The coach survey included questions related to coaching history, coaching training, sports history, and demographics. The youth survey included questions related to experiences playing sports and demographics. The surveys focused on reaching women (18–64 years old) and girls (12–17 years old) living in Southeast Michigan and Western New York.



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Introduction

Existing reports and literature describe the barriers to playing sports that are unique to girls' experiences. These barriers are important to consider as they can lead to less participation in sports as well as less access to the benefits of sports. Evidence also suggests that participation in sports can vary by other individual-level predictors, such as race/ethnicity, in addition to gender. A more nuanced understanding of the nature and causes of the barriers is less known. For example, many girls drop out of sports in middle school (Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Some factors influencing this drop-out rate include:

- fewer sports opportunities for girls in high school compared to boys (National Federation of State High School Associations [NFHS], 2019)
- accessibility of opportunities to be physically active based on neighborhood environment, location, and time (Chaparro et al., 2019; Nicksic et al., 2018; Slate et al., 2013; Somerset & Hoare, 2018)
- costs associated with playing a sport (Aspen Institute, 2022b)
- body and gender role differentiation from boys that can lead to increased experiences of sexism and less enjoyment of playing sports (Keathley et al., 2013)
- competing priorities experienced more by girls than boys, such as caring for younger children (O'Reilly et al., 2018)

Additionally, female role models play an important role in influencing interest and engagement among girls in sports

and physical activity (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Therefore, it is also important to understand barriers to coaching among women, especially since retention of girls in sports can be impacted by coaches as well as their level of training and education (Zarrett et al. 2019). Research reveals that women coaches often have qualitatively different experiences than their male counterparts, with some of these contributing to less engagement and retention. Some factors include a lack of mentoring and role models, gender-role stereotyping, oversexualization and marginalization of women by the media, intention-related variables such as interest and self-efficacy, access to childcare/a supportive spouse or partner, and preparation (interviews, resumes, experience) (Walker & Bopp, 2010). However, more is yet to be explored about the nature and causes of these barriers.

To close these gaps in understanding, WSF conducted a three-year research initiative funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation focused on addressing access, engagement, and retention in sports for girls in under-resourced communities as well as the lack of women coaches working in the youth sports space. The research initiative includes four phases:

- **Phase 1: Literature review.** This phase focused on overall trends in girls' participation in sports and in women coaching girls' sports.
- **Phase 2: Qualitative research.** This phase focused on exploring the structure of girls' sports, common experiences of girls who participate in (and do not participate in) sports, community and environmental influences, what has been tried in these areas, and the experiences of women coaches. Methods used in this phase included interviews with regional sports leaders, focus groups with middle and high school girls in Southeast Michigan (SEMI) and Western New York (WNY), a semi-structured survey with women coaches, and observations of events through Project Play Southeast Michigan.
- **Phase 3: Survey research.** This phase is the focus of this report and will be described in further detail below.
- **Phase 4: Community-centric strategic planning.** WSF is working with local leaders in both regions to help translate the data-driven insights into new strategies and resources/guides to serve the communities.

The qualitative research phase found many of the same barriers as other studies, for example, that girls have competing responsibilities and that female coaches are poorly paid or unpaid (See [Appendix A](#)). There were also findings that echo new, emerging, or less-well-documented issues, such as those for girls' participation in sports that spotlighted the importance



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of time outside, engaging with friends, or the mixed benefits and drawbacks of competition. For coaches, the potential benefits of gender-sensitive coaching stood out as important.

Research Questions

Women Coaches

The following research questions focused on women who currently coach, have coached in the past, or have never coached but are interested in coaching.

- What are the benefits of coaching (e.g., mentorship of younger people, community connectedness) that could be promoted, reinforced, or amplified to encourage participation and retention in coaching? Does this vary by race (POC vs. not) or coach status (current coach vs. former coach)?
- What are the barriers to coaching (e.g., not feeling confident or skilled) and negative events that affect participation in coaching?
- What are the facilitators and barriers that affect intention to coach a sport in the next 12 months?

- How much training have coaches experienced? How much and what kind of coaching training do they want?
- What do coaches and prospective coaches believe about the gender-specific needs of girls in coaching?

Girls in Sports

The following research questions focused on girls who play, have played, and have never played sports.

- Which psychosocial characteristics of girls (e.g., competitiveness and identity as an athlete) could be promoted, reinforced, or amplified to encourage participation and retention in sports? Does this vary by race (POC vs. not), age (12–14 vs. 15–17), or participation in sports (currently vs. not currently playing sports)?
- How do girls' experiences in general and gender-specific experiences (e.g., feeling that coaches understand specific needs of girls, experiences of teasing) associate with race (POC vs. not), age (12–14 vs. 15–17), or participation in sports (currently vs. not currently playing sports)?
- What is the role of encouragement from influential adults and parents/guardians in influencing girls' participation in sports?



Literature Review



This literature review informs a 3-year research initiative centered on two topic areas: 1) trends, challenges, and strategies to address underserved girls' participation and engagement in sports; and 2) trends, challenges, and strategies in increasing the number of women coaching youth sports. This review of the literature is structured according to the research aims, with pages 9–22 addressing girls' participation in sports and pages 22–24 focused on women coaching youth sports.

Percentage of Girls (8–18) Who Play Sports or Participate in Physical Activity Each Year

The review begins with an overview of the percentage of girls ages 8–18 who play sports or participate in physical activity each year. This will include research on unstructured play and school-based and community-based sports. Evidence suggests that this varies by individual-level predictors like sexual orientation, gender identity (e.g., transgender, cisgender), disability status, race/ethnicity, income, and geography.

International research suggests more girls report “never” participating in physical education (PE) during the week and fewer report participating in PE 5 or more days per week compared to boys (ages 13–14 and 15–17). The greatest percentage who never participated in PE was in high-income countries. In regional comparisons, the rate of “never” participating is much higher for girls in Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa compared to other regions (Martins et al., 2020).

According to research presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) in the United States, less than 25% of children, inclusive of boys and girls, ages 6–17 years participate in 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

In the past, the difference between boys' and girls' sports participation was large, however girls' sports participation has grown since the enactment of Title IX in the early 1970s. Differences persist, though. In 2023 about a third (34%) of girls ages 6–12 participated regularly in sports, compared to about 52% of boys. The gap between girls' and boys' participation is shrinking due to an increase in participation among girls since 2013, but also a decrease in boys' participation. Among children with disabilities, boys participate in sports at a higher rate than girls as well (Aspen Institute, 2018; Solomon, 2024; Staurowsky et al., 2020).

Among high school girls, estimates for sports participation range from about 44% to 68%. In research published in 2019, fewer than half of high school girls participated in sports despite having more sports offered to girls. Girls were offered 13 sports teams compared to eight offered to boys (Veliz et al., 2019). In the 2015–16 academic year, participation rates were still higher for boys (52.3%) than for girls (43.6%) (Zarrett et al., 2018).

As of 2024–25, 3.5 million girls played high school sports. Nearly 43% of high school athletes were girls (NFHS, 2025). Differences still persist, though in both general physical activity and sports participation. Nationwide in 2023, according to Youth Risk

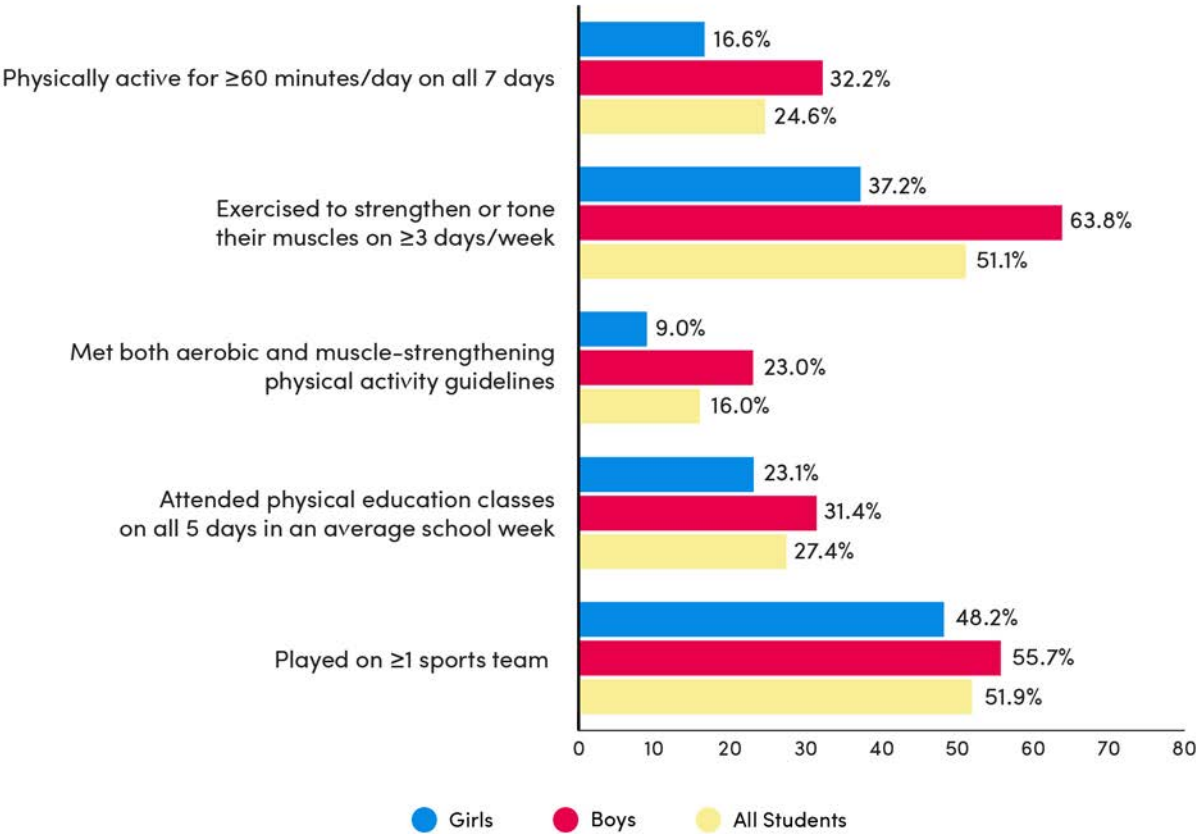


Behavior Survey Data, high school girls were consistently less physically active, had a lower rate of exercise and meeting aerobic and muscle strengthening guidelines, and had lower rates of PE attendance and sports involvement than boys (CDC, 2025) (see Figure A). Figure B (on following page) showing trends in girls' versus boys' sports participation since the passage of Title IX in 1972.

Differences in sports participation and physical activity exist within girls by race/ethnicity and sexual identity. In 2015, White, non-Hispanic girls participated at a rate of 60.7%, compared to about 48% of non-Hispanic Black girls, 41% of Hispanic and 36% of Asian high school girls. Additionally, girls with normal weight status, as indicated by a Body Mass Index (BMI) between the 5th and the 85th percentile, participated at a rate of 58.1%, compared to 50.0% of overweight (BMI between 85th and 95th percentile) and 36.5% of obese high school girls (≥95th percentile) (Simon & Uddin, 2018).

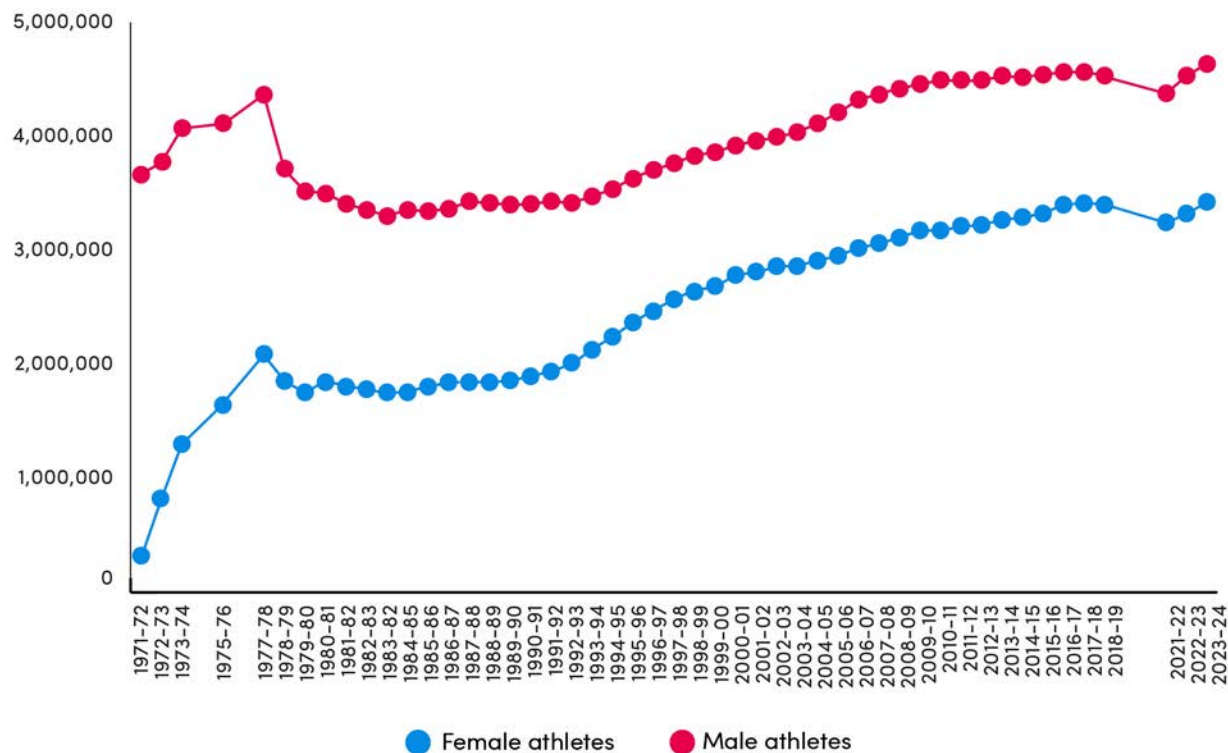
In 2017, the Human Rights Campaign (2017) reported that 68% of high school students participated in sports; LGBTQ+ girls participated at a rate of 29%, and girls identifying as transgender participated at a rate of 12%. Among those who play, 80% of LGBTQ+ youth and 82% of transgender and gender expansive/non-conforming youth do not disclose their sexual identity to their coaches (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2017). This is due, in part, to fears of bias, discrimination or other harm. In a 2013 study conducted by GLSEN, an advocacy organization that seeks to ensure that “every student has the right to a safe, supportive and LGBTQ-inclusive K-12 education,” 40% of LGBTQ+ students avoid locker rooms due to safety concerns (GLSEN, 2013). About a fourth of responding LGBTQ+ students avoided athletic facilities and fields as well. A 2015 National School Climate Survey confirmed this trend, with about 33% of LGBTQ+ students reporting that they did not feel safe in school locker rooms (Krane et al., 2018).

Figure A: Dietary and Physical Activity Behaviors Among High School Students



Note: Data from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report for Dietary, Physical Activity, and Sleep Behaviors: 2013–2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Figure B. High School Sports Participation by Gender, 1971-72 to 2023-24



Note: Data from National Federation of State High School Associations, 2024.

Factors Impacting Access of Girls in Sports and Physical Activity

Numerous factors impact the access, engagement and retention of girls in quality sports and physical activity. Data show that girls are less engaged in sports and physical activity to begin with and, as they age, they leave sports at a higher rate than boys do. The following provides an overview of what is currently known about these phenomena.

Factors that impact girls' access to sports and physical activity include the availability of opportunities, transportation, cost, gender norms/gender role stereotypes, and competing priorities.

Opportunities to engage in sports and physical activity vary by both geography (urban, rural, suburban) and gender.

Opportunities

There is **regional variation in state regulations for PE and the adherence of school districts** to those regulations. In New York State (NYS), grades K-3 students must have daily physical education for a minimum total of 120 minutes per week, grades 4-6 for a minimum of 3 days per week and 120 minutes per

week. Recess does not count toward PE minutes requirements. Students in grades 5-6 may follow the standards for grades 4-6 or, if housed with grades 7-8, must have PE not less than three times per week one semester and two times per week in the other semester (or comparable time each semester based on school organization). For high school, NYS students must earn $\frac{1}{4}$ credit in physical education for every semester they are enrolled in NYS high school until the end of their eighth semester of high school (New York State Education Department, n.d.).

In Michigan, physical education is mandated for elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools, however, the number of minutes and times per week are not specified (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.).

In New York State, not all districts adhere to the requirements for PE. For example, an audit of 10 districts in 2018 found that elementary schools generally did not adhere to the state standards and only one high school met the minimum PE minutes and day requirements (State of New York Office of the State Comptroller, 2018).

There is a gender gap in PE participation that emerges around sixth grade. In a study by Sabo and Veliz (2008), among sixth-through eighth-graders, 11% of girls and 8% of boys reported no PE; among ninth- to 10th-grade students, 22% of girls and

16% of boys reported no PE, and among 11th- and 12th-grade students, 58% of girls and 49% of boys reported no PE in a national sample.

Specifically looking at 11th-12th grade by gender and location — 84% of girls in urban schools reported no PE, compared to 46% of boys in urban schools; 48% of girls versus 53% of boys in suburban schools reported no PE; 69% of girls versus 42% of boys in rural schools reported no PE (Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

In addition to PE participation, there is variation in sports participation opportunities for girls. Within high schools, there are *more opportunities* for boys to participate in sports than for girls. From 2023–24 there were 3.4 million opportunities for girls to play high school sports compared to the 4.6 million opportunities for boys (National Federation of State High School Associations [NFSHSA], 2024). This may reflect a lack of compliance with Title IX. Also confirming this, a 2018 report indicated that the gap between girls' and boys' sports opportunities had not significantly narrowed (Zarrett et al., 2018).

A 2020 WSF report showed that only 28.3% of Black/African American girls and 35.5% of Latinx girls currently played sports, while 37.9% of White girls did (Zarrett et al., 2020). In another study, over 75% of boys from immigrant families were involved in athletics, while less than half of girls from immigrant families were (Sabo & Veliz, 2008).

In general, schools with higher White enrollment provided more opportunities than schools with higher enrollment of students identifying as minoritized race/ethnicity (BIPOC) (i.e., less than 10% white enrollment). This is attributed to the gaps in resources available to high schools with higher enrollment of students identified as minoritized race/ethnicity (National Women's Law Center [NWLC], 2011). This racial disparity is largely attributable to income. Black and brown communities experience disproportionate rates of low income/poverty due, in

part, to systemic and structural racism. When funding to public schools is dependent on revenue from local property taxes, schools in poorer areas will be inadequately funded compared to their wealthier counterparts (The University of the State of New York, 2024).

Similarly connected to income disparities, a 2014 study found that White girls were three times more likely to be involved in sports through a private organization than Black/African American girls were (21% versus 7%). Private organizations provide opportunities not offered in school and/or at times not offered in schools (Graves et al., 2014).

Adults are aware of the disparity in sports opportunities. A 2017 report from YouGov America, Inc., and the Women's Sports Foundation found that, while nearly all adults surveyed believe that sports are equally important for girls and boys, 60% agree that girls have fewer sports opportunities than boys do. Among these respondents, fewer than half (43%) know what they can do to help girls become more active in sports. Among adults with daughters who play(ed) high school or college sports, 57% reported that they knew the steps they could personally take to help girls become more active in sports. Again, details on what they would do were not queried or provided (YouGov America, Inc., 2017).

The accessibility of opportunities to be physically active or participate in sports varies by neighborhood environment, location, and time. For example, girls in low-crime neighborhoods have higher rates of physical activity (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). Girls in higher-crime areas have lower rates of physical activity and also higher rates of obesity. Specifically, in a 2019 study using the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, researchers found that girls who lived in high-crime areas had 26% lower odds of participating in moderate to vigorous physical activity during an average week compared to those in lower crime areas (Chaparro et al., 2019). Neighborhood safety is particularly important for girls' engagement in physical activity (Nicksic et al., 2018). In addition to safety, neighborhood walkability is associated with girls' engagement in physical activity (Jia et al., 2019). A study in Memphis, Tennessee, by Yang et al. (2018) found that boys are more physically active than girls, regardless of neighborhood characteristics. However, girls in this study were "particularly sensitive to population density, percent of poverty and unhealthy food environment." Being overweight or obese was inversely associated with population density and positively associated with the percentage of people living in poverty and the percentage of unhealthy food available for girls in middle and high school (Yang et al., 2018). The authors suggest that higher population density could be associated with higher level of land use mix that may be associated with girls' outdoor physical activities. The relationship to poverty is explained by the lower safety and higher crime levels in higher poverty communities - which decreases opportunities for girls to play/be physically active outside. The connection to unhealthy food for girls but not boys is explained by the higher tendency for girls to emotionally eat under stress as cited in Vicennati et al., 2009. Similarly, other researchers have found that girls with access to play spaces



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where there are more people and where they can convene with others they know are more likely to be physically active (Slater et al., 2013).

In addition to the neighborhood environment, the **location** of the sport or physical activity can impact the ability of youth to participate due to individual- and/or family-level barriers. This is often related to the distance away and the associated need for time and transportation (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). The **time** of day and week of opportunities may influence participation. This intersects with competing priorities, location, and transportation. For example, if a girl can access a physical activity at a location that is within walking distance of her home, but it is offered in the evening, the walk home afterwards may pose a barrier to participation (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). If it is located a greater distance from home and transportation is difficult or conflicts with work or other family member schedules, it may not be possible to participate. Transportation is one of the largest barriers for many families for access to healthcare and social services, let alone access to sports and physical activity.

Similar to barriers related to neighborhood safety, location, time, and transportation, **cost** poses a major barrier to sports participation. Participation of girls in sports is higher in communities with higher median incomes; low-income families cite cost as a reason for not participating. A 2019 study found that 42% of low-income families who reported that their kids were not playing sports indicated that cost was the main reason (Whitaker et al., 2019). Variation in sports participation by gender is somewhat mitigated by income. The differences in sports and physical activity participation by gender are less in communities with higher median incomes (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Swanson, 2016). With higher community median income, there is higher girls' sports participation. This may relate to the previously cited variation in sports opportunities that are tied to the school district property tax revenue. It also may be connected to individual family ability to afford sports equipment,

travel, private club participation, and other associated costs of sports participation. This financial barrier is disproportionately experienced among communities of color. As reported by Graves et al. (2014), a third of African American parents reported in a nationwide survey that their daughter did not participate in sports or had to stop participating in sports because it became unaffordable for the family. Only 18% of parents of White girls reported this (Graves et al., 2014).

All sports are not available within all school districts. Also, sometimes youth would like to engage in community-based sports during the summer or in addition to school participation. Community-based sports' costs are high and increasing in many communities. In 2019, Whitaker and colleagues reported that 58% of community-based sports fees are increasing. As an example of a costly sport, athletes in elite volleyball clubs spend around \$7,000 each year on gear, equipment, travel, and tournaments. This participation often provides them with an advantage in school-based teams (junior varsity and varsity), making it difficult for non-club sports participants to compete for a place on the team (Friedman, 2017).

The average cost of children's sports varies by type of sport. On average, U.S. families pay about \$883 in a child's primary sport (Aspen Institute, 2022b). This includes registration, equipment, travel, lessons, camps, and other costs. These costs are up from pre-pandemic costs; reasons cited include inflation, more or better equipment, more frequent training, more or better coaching, and more frequent travel. In survey results from 2022, Black parents reported spending less on one child's primary sport (\$574) compared to White (\$881) and Hispanic/Latinx (\$883) families. In this study, Hispanic/Latinx families reported spending more on private lessons and White families reported spending more on registration fees and individualized lessons. There was no difference in spending by gender. Families with a household income of \$150K or more spent more than twice as much per year (\$2,068) as the average. Of the most common sports in the survey, soccer was the most expensive (\$1,188), followed closely by basketball (\$1,002). Baseball was \$714 on average annually, and tackle football was \$581 (Aspen Institute, 2022b). Another resource that reviews the average cost per sport for children aged 1-18 shows average family spending exceeding \$2,500 for hockey (PlaygroundEquipment.com, 2023). Cost was also high for skiing/snowboarding, field hockey, gymnastics, lacrosse, tennis and cycling. The most affordable sports were track and field (\$191), flag football (\$268), skateboarding (\$380), and cross country (\$421). Cost often increases with age, with equipment becoming more expensive, travel to further destinations, and training becoming more competitive (PlaygroundEquipment.com, 2023).

As suggested previously, schools with lower funding or in poorer communities lack the financial ability to provide facilities, personnel, and programs to youth. Schools are not providing ample scholarship support to high school athletes to offset the financial barriers to participation. In their 2019 report, Whitaker et al., found that 63% of school budgets were stagnant or decreasing. Due to the disproportionate representation of African American and Hispanic/Latinx youth in low-income

schools, disparate rates of African American girls' participation in physical activity have been attributed to their schools having fewer resources and higher poverty rates, which impacts the physical resources like gymnasiums and fields, human resources like coaches and assistants, and overall opportunities to play (Graves et al., 2014). When schools or communities are able to offer scholarships to offset expenses related to sports, African American girls report that financial barriers were fewer, and sports participation was higher (Wright et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the offering of scholarships is very rare.

Factors Impacting Engagement of Girls in Sports and Physical Activity

Perceptions of gender norms and roles vary by ethnicity, religion, culture, and other attributes of human populations. Often parental views of gender roles influence whether they encourage and/or support their daughters' participation in sports and physical activity. In general, studies have found that parents tend to value sports participation more for their sons than their daughters (Heinze et al., 2017). This has been observed among some populations of immigrants to the United States. **According to several researchers, girls in families who have immigrated to the United States have lower rates of participating in sports compared to boys in similar families** (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Thul et al., 2015; Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, 2018). This has been attributed to the trend for some immigrant families to hold gender role beliefs aligning to more traditional cultures or religions. Parental negative or disapproving attitudes can directly or indirectly affect daughters' sports participation. In a study conducted in Norway comparing sports participation of "minority" and "majority" youth, religious denomination explained some of the difference in "minority" girls' sports participation. The authors caution, however, to not exclusively compare youth adhering to Islam, for example, to those who do not. As with all religions and cultures, there is variation in the way they are practiced. Some of this variation may be related to other factors like class, national differences, and other cultural traditions (Strandbu et al., 2019). In their study, "minority" boys, many of whom identified as Muslim, had equal or higher rates of sports participation than "majority" boys, as well as "majority" and "minority" girls. "Minority" girls had the lowest sports participation. The authors go on to explore the role that gendered identities may have on young girls in immigrant families. They cite studies of immigrant communities wherein there are stronger expectations for girls to adhere to traditional behavior in order to be the bearers of the ethnic group's traditions within their new home (Strandbu et al., 2019; Dion & Dion, 2001; Prieur, 2002). In the U.S., a 2021 study of Latinx youth found that boys were more likely than girls to participate in sports, socioeconomic status influenced Latinx girls' sports participation more than boys' participation, and sports participation was higher among the girls for whom English was their native language than for those who learned it as a second/additional language (McGovern, 2021).

While it may be more common within some immigrant communities to minimize the importance of sports and physical activity for girls compared to boys, it is not exclusively a trait of immigrant families. Beliefs and practices demonstrating different views of gender norms persist in U.S. culture, in general.

Zarrett, Cooky, and Veliz reported in 2019 that 32% of the girls in their study ($n=1,129$, ages 7-13) said that boys made them feel uncomfortable or made fun of them while they were practicing sports.

Conversely, strong family support and sports culture can positively impact girls' participation in sports. A 2023 study of Black girls' participation in sports reported that the largest influence on their sports participation was playing sports with adult family members (Ogunrinde, 2023).

Also related to societal or cultural perceptions, about a third of girls in the study cited appearance-related reasons for their participation in sports. The tendency for girls to view their bodies from the outside (based on how they perceive that others see them) compared to living inside their bodies (what their strength and body's capabilities are) can make them more prone to body negativity, self-consciousness when participating in physical activity, and more concerns related to their appearance (Zarrett et al., 2019).

Specific to Black/African American girls, several studies have found that Black female athletes' concerns about their hair and appearance are often barriers to participation in sports (Woolford et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017; Rice et al., 2018). In the Rice et al. (2018) study, marathon runners inclusive of 12 Black females and eight Black males were interviewed. Reflecting on their journey as endurance runners, females emphasized the importance of hair in Black culture, which some addressed by changing their hairstyle. They also discussed the concern that being a runner could make them "skinny," or cause them to "lose their butt." One participant went on to explain this as a misconception; that endurance runners come in many shapes and sizes. A 2019 study of 78 Latina girls between 12 and 17 years old found that they experienced self-consciousness and gender-related teasing as barriers to sports participation (Lopez, 2019).

Sometimes **gender norms or stereotypes contribute to competing priorities that are experienced more by girls compared to boys.** Girls, particularly girls of color or girls living in lower-income families, may experience competing demands or responsibilities like employment, childcare, household responsibilities, etc., that make it difficult to make the time to participate in sports (O'Reilly et al., 2018; Dlugonski et al., 2017). Many work part-time jobs to contribute to the family income. Many are responsible for household maintenance and taking care of other siblings at home.

Overt discrimination, intolerance, and hostile climates experienced by trans people, gender non-conforming people, and other categories of LGBTQ+ people, often discourage participation among these populations (Dennison and Kitchen, 2015). Dennison and Kitchen (2015) reported that most

Americans (84%) said they had either witnessed or experienced **anti-LGBTQ+** attitudes in sports. In a survey of youth aged 12–22, Calzo et al. (2014) found that youth identifying as LGBTQ+ were between 46% and 76% less likely to participate in sports compared to their peers identifying as heterosexual. A 2018 southeast Michigan study of 1,046 responses to a survey of high school students found that 1 in 4 youth identifying as LGBTQ+ said they avoided athletic facilities and fields at school because they felt unsafe. About 11% said that they were discouraged by school staff or coaches from playing sports due to their LGBTQ+ identity (Kulick et al., 2019).

A 2022 study of over 15,000 youth responding to a large study on school-related experiences found that being transgender and being nonbinary were associated with lower sports participation (Clark and Kosciw, 2022b). Transgender, nonbinary youth and transgender males had the lowest sports participation. This study also synthesized the literature on sexual minority youth sports participation. Some of the key findings from their review include:

- Heterosexual boys have higher sports participation than heterosexual girls and all sexual minority youth (Toomey & Russell, 2013).
- Sexual minority girls participate in sports less than heterosexual girls (Toomey & Russell, 2013).
- Sexual minority males participate in sports less than heterosexual males, but participation varies by sexual minority orientation identity among females—bisexual girls were less likely to participate in sports than heterosexual girls, there was no difference between lesbian and heterosexual girls (Doull et al., 2018).

A systematic review of girls' perceptions of physical activity found four overarching themes: "gender bias in sport," "motivation and perceived confidence," "competing priorities during adolescence," and "meeting societal expectations" (Corr et al., 2019). These themes have all been alluded to in the studies covered above. In addition to these themes, engagement may be impacted by **enjoyment of the sport, format and frequency of PE class, and the availability of non-traditional types of physical activity or sport variety.**

In a longitudinal cohort study in Ontario, Canada, of children enrolled in grades 4–6, the researchers found that reported **enjoyment** of sports and physical activity decreased from grade 4 to grade 6 among girls but not among boys (Cairney et al., 2012). These differences by gender did not appear among children with higher reported competence in sports and athletics. Gender differences emerged among children with lower perceived competence, with boys' participation remaining constant despite perceived confidence but girls' participation decreasing (Cairney et al., 2012).

Girls often engage more in PE class when they are **separated by gender**. Wallace et al. (2020) found that girls in single-gender PE had higher activity levels compared to those in mixed-gender PE classes. Also, data from Youth Risk Behavior Surveys from 2004–16 showed that girls engage in more in physical activity

in schools that **require more than 90 minutes** per week of PE (Lin et al., 2020).

Girls often **engage more in non-traditional types of physical activity** (e.g., dance, hip-hop, jump rope, Zumba) than in traditional team sports. These non-traditional offerings are not as common in schools as traditional sports. Duncan (2019) reported about a successful Philadelphia program that engaged 13- to 17-year-old African American girls in danceLogic, which integrated dance with computer programming. There were elements from hip hop combined with math and technology (e.g., numbers and patterns).

Girls respond well to **more variety in sports offerings**, with a focus on inclusive, non-traditional sports. Drake et al (2015) found that girls in New Hampshire and Vermont played on more sports teams when they were offered a wider variety of options. Often the wider variety included more inclusive, non-traditional sports. A 2018 study of Minnesota girls found that track and field, cross country, and soccer are becoming more popular while basketball, swimming/diving, and golf are declining (Kaul, 2018).

Girls report **being influenced to behave like those around them** who are often indoors and on electronic devices (in this technological age of smartphones and social media). Participation in outdoor activities or sports limits the ability to actively engage in social media and play computer games. This was seen in one 2018 photovoice study of Girl Scouts (aged 7–11) interviewed about their lack of participation in outdoor physical activity. They explained that others around them are often on their electronic devices (phones) and they are drawn to also be on social media and play computer games like those around them (Sackett et al., 2018).

The support of their peers is also integral for sports and physical activity participation among girls. A 2022 study on physical activity participation among adolescent girls and boys found that girls who participated in physical activity reported higher perceived friend support than girls who did not participate in physical activity (Lawler et al., 2022). Also, peer acceptance may mediate the influence of sports participation on self-esteem. In other words, girls who play sports and feel accepted by their peers are more likely to have higher self-esteem than those who do not have the same sense of belonging (Daniels & Leaper, 2006).

Related to perceptions of what everyone else is doing, girls often lack positive role models for physical activity and sports participation in community, schools, or media. This affects what their perception of "normal" or acceptable is (O'Reilly et al., 2018). There is also a **lack of media exposure to women's sports and attendance at women's sporting events**, which impacts the interest and engagement of girls in sports and physical activity (O'Reilly et al., 2018).

Factors Impacting Retention of Girls in Sports and Physical Activity

Attrition from sports is higher for girls compared to boys.

Reported in 2008 and 2014, sports attrition among adolescents across elementary, middle, and high school tends to be highest among girls, youth who are racially/ethnically minoritized, and youth from lower socioeconomic households (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; 2014). The attrition rates between eighth and 12th grade in all sports are two to three times higher for girls than for boys (Sabo & Veliz, 2014). In basketball, for example, the attrition rates were -64% for girls and -36% for boys. The rates in lacrosse were -42% and -13%, and -53% and -31% in soccer (Sabo & Veliz, 2014).

In 2016, Sabo and Veliz reported a 32% attrition rate between eighth and 12th grade (or age 13–18) across all socioeconomic levels. The data from the United States Monitoring the Future study, inclusive of participation and attrition rates in 15 different organized sports, showed that attrition was highest in field hockey, gymnastics and volleyball (Sabo & Veliz, 2016).

In 2018, the attrition rate for girls was estimated to be 29.6% across 20 sports. All sports experienced losses of greater than 20%. The highest rates were seen in gymnastics (69%), basketball (63.8%), football (63.3%), volleyball (61.2%), crew (60.3%), field hockey (60.2%), and cheerleading (58.4%) (Zarrett & Veliz, 2021). Lower rates of attrition were seen in “other sport” (13.9%), weightlifting (21.6%), tennis (25.5%), and cross country

(29.2%). Rates of participation in these sports, with the exception of “other sport,” were relatively low to begin with (Zarrett & Veliz, 2021) (see Table A on following page).

The sports that have higher participation percentages from minoritized youth also showed higher rates of attrition between eighth and 12th grade compared to sports with higher percentages of White youth. Participation in “other sports” is generally higher among girls than boys but increased among boys between eighth and 12th grade and decreased among girls (Sabo & Veliz, 2014). “Other sports” includes less common or traditional sports that are not included in the sports listed in Table A. Examples include aerial dance, martial arts, bowling, and archery.

Many of the same factors that affect participation also affect the retention of girls in sports. Some additional factors include beginning sports at younger ages, having parents/family who support them and having strong, supportive coaches.

Girls who **begin physical activity and sports at younger ages** tend to stay in sports for longer. An Australian study of 29,225 female participants found that about one-third of those who began playing a sport between 4 and 9 years old continued for 7 years (Eime et al., 2020). This decreased with age at sports commencement from 10–19. That is, with later entry into sports, the lower the number of continuous years played. This may, in part, be due to the different phases in which sports



Table A: Examining Differences in Teen Girls' Sport Participation by Race

Overall	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	
Does not participate in sport	40.0%	50.9%	52.5%	43.6%	***
Participates in at least one sport	60.0%	49.1%	47.5%	56.4%	***
Number of sports					
Does not participate in sport	40.0%	50.9%	52.5%	43.6%	***
Participates in one sport	31.2%	26.3%	27.7%	29.8%	***
Participates in 2+ sports	28.8%	22.8%	19.8%	26.6%	***
Most popular sports					
Basketball	9.8%	18.5%	9.0%	11.9%	***
Volleyball	12.5%	9.5%	9.3%	12.4%	***
Soccer	10.6%	2.7%	14.8%	8.7%	***
Baseball/Softball	12.7%	7.8%	8.8%	8.6%	***
Track and Field	10.3%	14.3%	6.8%	9.2%	***
Cheerleading	6.0%	8.2%	3.8%	6.8%	***
Swimming and Diving	6.9%	4.6%	5.9%	8.4%	**
Tennis	6.1%	4.2%	2.7%	6.9%	***
Gymnastics	2.9%	2.2%	1.9%	2.1%	
Weightlifting	4.6%	3.6%	3.0%	3.5%	*
Cross Country	4.4%	2.3%	3.7%	3.7%	**
Football	2.0%	2.9%	1.8%	2.9%	
Lacrosse	2.1%	0.5%	0.8%	1.7%	***
Emerging sports/less popular					
Field Hockey	1.6%	0.2%	0.3%	1.3%	***
Golf	1.4%	0.4%	0.6%	0.8%	**
Equestrian	1.8%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%	***
Wrestling	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	1.2%	
Crew	0.3%	0.2%	0.5%	0.3%	
Ice Hockey	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	0.5%	*
Water Polo	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.5%	
Other Sport	20.3%	16.2%	15.7%	18.7%	***

$p < .05^*$; $p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

Significance tests were based on Chi-Square tests of independence (see methods section for more details).

Table 2 in Zarrett, N., & Veliz, P. (2021). *Teen Sport in America, Part II: Her Participation Matters*. Women's Sports Foundation.

are structured and youth engage in them. Between 6 and 12 is considered the “sampling phase” wherein children participate in a variety of sports and deliberate play. Ages 13+ is considered the recreational years, which is an extension of sampling, and then specialization occurs in ages 13–15 and investment in ages 16+ wherein youth who are more interested in competitive or performance-oriented pathways continue (Eime et al., 2020).

The literature on early sports participation ensuring long-term participation, though, should consider the type of early sports participation. Youth who are enrolled in a single, competitive sport at early ages may experience emotional exhaustion, injury, and other negative consequences (Strachan et al., 2009; Mosher et al., 2022; McFadden et al., 2016).

Similar to the trends seen in opportunities and engagement in sports and physical activity, the factors associated with retention in sports also are experienced differently by race/ethnicity, urban/rural/suburban residence, and income status. In the United States, Sabo and Veliz reported in 2008 that White girls enter sports at younger ages, with 53% participating at age 6 or younger, compared to 29% of African American girls and 32% of Hispanic girls. This early entry trend intersects with income as well as cultural norms that may be experienced differently in African American and Latinx/Hispanic households as described previously.

Girls with parents who support them through transportation, attendance at events, buying equipment, providing food, attending sporting events together, and supporting the costs associated with sports participation throughout the year are more likely to stay engaged in sports/physical activity (Zarrett et al., 2020). A study by the Women's Sports Foundation found that parental support did not vary much between boys who stayed in the sport versus dropped out. Among girls, current players reported higher participation and support from their parents compared to girls who had discontinued participation. This may imply that parental support impacts girls' participation and retention more than it impacts boys' participation and retention in sports (Zarrett et al., 2020).

Retention is also impacted by the coaches and their level of training and education. Girls whose coaches have adequate training and education, form strong relationships with them, and integrate healthy competition and goal setting are more likely to remain engaged in sports/physical activity (Zarrett et al., 2019). Among girls 7–13, coaches have a strong positive influence on girls like or love of sports and intention to continue playing if they combine fun with healthy competition and incorporate goal setting and supportive relationships (Zarrett et al., 2019). A 2015 study of 9- to 12-year-old girls in Australia found a difference in the level of engagement between girls with educated versus uneducated coaches (Guagliano et al., 2015).

Most Important Factors Associated With Participation, Access, Engagement, and Retention Nationally

Having thoroughly reviewed current trends in participation and factors related to access, engagement and retention of girls in quality sports and physical activity, we turn to evidence indicating the most important and mutable factors. These include predictors of beginning, staying in and dropping out of participation in sports and physical activity. These predictors vary by sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, race/ethnicity, and income/poverty level. This section first provides an overview of the disparity in sports participation



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by these characteristics. Reasons for these differences can be seen in the first section of this literature review (availability of opportunities, cost, cultural norms, competing priorities, role models and media representation, availability of non-traditional physical activity and sports, and parental support).

To summarize, girls enter sports later and exit earlier than boys, fewer girls participate in sports and physical activity compared to boys, and girls exit sports earlier than boys (Staurowsky et al., 2020; Sabo & Veliz, 2008). There is disparity between girls with some girls entering later, participating in fewer numbers, and exiting earlier compared to other girls, particularly:

- **Girls of lower socioeconomic status**
- **Girls of color:** Black girls have a higher likelihood of attending schools with fewer resources and higher poverty rates compared to White girls, which limits their access to physical activity and sports opportunities (NWLC, 2011). Lower school funding results in fewer school resources like gymnasiums and fields, coaches, and sports/physical activity programs. Compared to Black girls, more White girls access sports through private organizations; Black girls are more likely to participate in sports offered at school (Graves et al., 2014).
- **Girls in urban and rural areas (compared to suburban areas)**
- **Girls with disabilities:** Girls with disabilities participate in sports at lower rates than boys with disabilities and at a lower rate than girls who do not have a disability. Among over 15,000 participants in adaptive sports activities nationally, 44% were female and 56% were male (NFSHSA, 2019). Girls with disabilities exercise on average the same as the general population without disabilities. These studies did not distinguish between types of disabilities (Staurowsky et al., 2020; Zarrett et al., 2018).
- **Girls in immigrant families:** Girls in immigrant families participate in sports at lower rates than boys in immigrant families. Explanations ranged from cultural norms, traditional gender role expectations, religion, and competing household responsibilities (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Staurowsky et al., 2020).
- **Girls who identify as LGBTQ+:** Girls who identify as LGBTQ+ participate in sports at lower rates than girls who don't identify as LGBTQ+ (HRC, 2017).

Girls, and specifically those within these identity categories, experience barriers disproportionately. This may include access to opportunities and a diversity of opportunities, the culture and climate of sports and physical activity and how it relates to societal context and cultural norms, and the presence or absence of parental support. These interact with each other and produce various intersectional disparities in sports and physical activity participation.

Increase opportunities and variety of choices for sports and physical activity

Opportunities within schools and communities are fewer for girls compared to boys, particularly in low-income environments/families and in communities of color. Even if a girl started in a sport or program, she is more likely to have difficulty accessing opportunities to continue to stay active compared to boys (Sabo & Veliz, 2008). Improving opportunity means not only providing programs, resources and coaches, but also considering transportation, timing, neighborhood safety, and the cost of the associated accessories and supplies needed for participation.

Create safe spaces and transform culture and climate for girls in sports and physical activity

The climate within sports environments may make it difficult for girls of color, girls with disabilities, LGBTQ+ girls, and gender non-conforming girls to stay in sports (even though it has improved in the last 10 years) (Staurowsky et al., 2020).

Anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes are still prevalent in many sectors of sports culture, and most people have either witnessed or directly experienced anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes in sports (HRC, 2017; Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Dennison & Kitchen, 2015). Intolerance of gender non-conformity was listed as a key barrier to participation by people identified as “sexual minorities” (Calzo et al., 2014).

Girls of color report feeling uncomfortable or “on-display” when they play a sport in which the majority of other players are White (Perkins & Partridge, 2014). Girls of color often navigate their characteristics related to their hair, physical appearance, body shape, etc., and how they are societally perceived (Wright et al., 2017; Rice et al., 2018). Cultural norms and the sometimes associated bullying or stigma associated with those norms impacts initiation and retention of girls in sports. Latinx girls report discomfort related to teasing (Lopez, 2019). Some populations of both U.S.-born and immigrant families may have negative attitudes toward daughter's participation in sports related to gender norms, religion, culture, etc. (Strandbu, 2019).

Encourage parental support for sports and physical activity

Intersecting with cultural norms, income, and time, girls' parents/family have a strong impact on their initiation, retention, and attrition from sports. Girls whose parents are heavily involved and supportive stay in sports longer/longer than girls who do not have supportive, engaged parents (Zarrett et al., 2020).

Consider the context and community

See section one for an overview of the variation in sports opportunities and access issues related to urban, rural, and suburban regions as well as by income status and walkability of neighborhoods. Also consider cultures represented in the community and how cultural norms that are common in the community could influence both opportunities as well as willingness to participate. Finally, look at specific examples regionally related to access to sports equipment that accommodates different cultures (helmets that can fit a hijab, sports hijabs, etc.) and abilities (adapted equipment).

Regional Review: Western New and Southeast Michigan

Two specific regions of interest in this review are Western New York (Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming Counties) and Southeast Michigan (Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties) compared to the national trends.

Greater Buffalo Region/Western New York

In Buffalo Public Schools, in 2021, 68% of middle school students and 67% of high school students were not physically active at least 60 minutes a day on 5 or more days. This is an increase from 59% of middle school students and 63% of high school students in 2019 (Buffalo Public Schools, 2021). Consistent with national trends, physical inactivity was higher among girls than among boys. In general, more high school students reported not participating in sports in 2021 than in 2019 (58% compared to 52%). Consistent with national trends, sports participation was lower among girls than among boys.

According to the State of Play Western New York report (Aspen Institute, 2017b):

- In the Western New York (WNY) region, 14% of girls and 18% of boys get adequate physical activity.
- Girls play an average of 1.8 sports.
- Forty-four percent of parents feel it is very important and 40% feel it is somewhat important for girls to participate in sports.
- Top sports for girls were swimming (23%), basketball (18%), soccer (16%), running (16%), gymnastics (16%), indoor soccer (11%), baseball (8%), cycling (6%), and football (flag) (2%).
- Most play in school teams or outside of school in organized teams; swimming is the most common one to be “casual/pickup.”
- Erie and Niagara Counties have the most adequate access to physical activity opportunities (this is defined by residence within a half mile of a park, or in urban census blocks– residence within 1 mile of a recreational facility, or in rural census blocks — residence within 3 miles of a



recreational facility). Youth residing in Allegany, Wyoming, Cattaraugus, Genesee, Chautauqua and Orleans Counties have less access than Erie and Niagara Counties.

- Youth do not do a lot of sports and physical activities at home — running and cycling are the most common (58% of youth report running and 30% report cycling).
- The lowest rates of physical activity by income occur in the \$50k–\$99k household income category. Children in homes within this income category are seven times more likely than youth in the highest-income households to be physically inactive and not engaged in sports.
- Resources related to Project Play in both Western New York and Southeast Michigan have amounted to \$100 million as of Fall 2025, according to the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and cover:
 - funding to youth sports organizations
 - new skateparks and playgrounds
 - multiyear initiative Project Play
 - connection of organizations through task force
 - Free Play Days and Free Play Zones at local organizations
 - program to introduce lesser-played sports in schools
 - coaches inducted into Project Play WNY Coaches Honor Roll
 - equipment sharing at libraries and other key organizations
 - She Can Coach events
 - Summer Track Series

Regional programs have been responsive to needs and assets assessments of the region and in line with best practices within girls' sports (e.g., safe locations, convenient days and times, positive experiences, limited transportation barriers, low to no cost, formation of strong relationships); programs have persevered and adapted to COVID pandemic — though activity has been adversely impacted. As part of a program grant from the Women's Sports Foundation, funding reports included:

- **Orleans County YMCA GirlStrong** focused on strength training, nutrition, leadership development, and team building. It was difficult to develop and launch the program in 2 years — it took the first year to get the word out and the program staffed adequately.
- **Middle School Girls in Sports, Algonquin Sports for Kids, Inc.**, provided opportunities to learn and play soccer, tennis, golf, and flag football. They addressed cultural hurdles, including having no boys present, the provision of personal equipment — sports hijab, sports bras — and identified that it was important for girls to be in groups of friends. It was more appealing for girls to have programming just for girls and to have small groups of girls to connect with and play.
- **Girls on the Run Buffalo** was implemented in several city public schools, charter schools, and a couple of rural schools and focused on running, providing a supportive safe space and improving confidence, competence, caring, character, and connection. Of note, the events really brought community together (aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, showed up to race day and supported the girls).
- **BestSelf Behavioral Health** fills a void of limited and inconsistent school-based sports offerings such as intramurals/sports sampling for girls in grades 6–8. The Building Brighter Futures (BBF) comprehensive expanded learning program is offered in 12 high-needs Buffalo public schools located in every zone of the city. BBF is designed to strengthen children, families, and communities by promoting academic achievement and positive youth development. The program is rooted in strong student voice and choice, so at the beginning of the season all age-appropriate girls will be able to participate in the program enrichment fair that will include a clinic on that season's sport. After the enrichment fair, participants list their enrichment choices and are slotted accordingly.



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Southeast Michigan

According to a 2020 report compiled for the state of Michigan on the status of high school girls' sports participation (Kochanek & Gould, 2020):

- Girls living in suburban areas and cities and who attend schools with more students who qualify for a higher percentage of free and reduced lunch (low socioeconomic status (SES)) are less likely to participate in high school sports. In contrast, girls from town and rural areas and who attend higher-SES schools are more likely to participate.
- Suburban schools had the largest number of girl athlete participants, followed by town, city, and rural schools.
- Suburban schools had the largest mean number of girls' teams (10) followed by town (nine), city (eight), and rural (seven) schools.
- The number of girls' teams declined with socioeconomic status, ranging from 12 to five teams for highest to lowest SES quarter, respectively).
- The average number of girls per sports team declined with socioeconomic status, ranging from 25 to five participants for highest to lowest SES quarter, respectively.
- Suburban schools had a higher average number of girls per sports team (21) followed by town (19), city (17), and rural (15) schools.

According to the State of Play for Southeast Michigan report (Aspen Institute, 2017a):

- Eleven percent of girls and 15% of boys are getting recommended daily physical activity.
- Girls play an average of 1.7 sports.
- Forty-one percent of parents state that it is very important and 41% of parents state that it is somewhat important that their child is involved in sports.
- Top sports for girls were gymnastics (22%), swimming (20%), running (16%), basketball (15%), soccer (13%), track and field (7%), soccer (indoor) (6%), cycling (6%), and baseball (4%).
- Participation is mostly on organized teams in school and outside of school.
- Monroe and St. Clair Counties have the lowest rate of adequate access for opportunities for physical activity (this is defined by residence within half mile of a park, or in urban census blocks — residence within 1 mile of a recreational facility, or in rural census blocks reside within 3 miles of a recreational facility).
- Some youth engage in physical activity at home; 64% of youth report cycling and 29% running near their homes.
- Children in the lowest household income group represented nearly 20% of children. They were more than 3.5 times more likely than youth from the highest-income group to be inactive and not engaged in sports.

Regional programs have been responsive to needs and assets assessments of the region and in line with best practices within girls' sports (e.g., safe locations, convenient days and times, positive experiences, limited transportation barriers, low to no cost, formation of strong relationships); programs have persevered and adapted to COVID pandemic — though activity has been adversely impacted. As part of a program grant from the Women's Sports Foundation, funding reports included:

- **Sports 4 Life—Ann Arbor YMCA—Young Women Making Waves** partnered with a university for pool access, provided a swimming program to encourage girls of color to engage in swimming. Nearly half had little to no swimming experience, and girls felt more confident afterwards in their swimming ability.
- **Racquet Up Detroit Squash and Youth Development** worked to restore squash programming and engage new participants. They were able to open a new facility. They have tracked girls from start into college scholarships and beyond.
- **Midnight Golf Program** focused on golf, financial education, personal etiquette, college access, creative writing, and public speaking and sought to minimize the learning gap resulting from the pandemic. They focus on support through anxiety as youth are navigating resocialization in the "new normal."
- **Figure Skating in Detroit Sports-Based Girls Development and Academic Program** helped to provide supplies (quality skates and uniforms), skate instruction, ice time, and skating shows, as well as a safe space. Related activities included yoga, calisthenics, Zumba, kick boxing, and barre.

Women Coaching Youth Sports

The second research question addressed in this review involves the trends in women coaching of girls' sports. Coaches are either volunteer or paid to lead a group or groups of young people through a structured sports activity. Project Play states that they are "the backbone of youth sports, serving as mentors, role models and inspirations for generations of young athletes." (Project Play Western New York, n.d.)

Nationally, what is the percentage of coaches of girls' sports and physical activity programs who are women? What training do they have? What are their backgrounds in sports? Also of interest, what does the career trajectory look like for female coaches? What are the barriers experienced by female coaches and what would facilitate more women to enter coaching?

Overall trends in women coaching girls' sports

Estimates range from 75%–85% of coaches of youth sports being men. Nearly 75% of youth head coaches are male (Balasaygun & Goldberg, 2023). Similarly, in 2015, researchers LaVoi and Leberman estimated that a majority (80–85%) of youth volunteer sports coaches are male. In the 2019 Women's Sports Foundation *Coaching through a Gender Lens* report, this

was slightly higher, with about a quarter (27%) of the 6.5 million adults who coach sports teams of youth aged 14 and younger being women (Zarrett et al., 2019).

In general, it is more common for women to coach younger players and girls rather than older players or boys (Murray et al., 2022). It is also more common for women to coach for sports that are conceptualized as feminine sports (e.g., gymnastics, cheer, and dance) compared to sports like martial arts, baseball, soccer and basketball, commonly associated with boys (Zarrett et al., 2019). According to a survey of girls in youth sports, women were more likely to coach an all-girls sports team (66% woman coach vs. 34% man coach) compared to a co-ed sports team (49% woman coach vs. 51% man coach) (Zarrett et al., 2019). Sometimes the acceptance of women as coaches is tied to the overall sports league's acceptance of female players. Messner and Bozada-Deas' (2009) study of Little League baseball and softball teams and the American Youth Soccer Organization's soccer teams over an 8-year period found that 13.4% of head coaches in soccer were women and 5.9% of head coaches in baseball and softball were women. Little League was originally established in 1938 as a league for boys only, and, when forced to include girls in 1974, they created a separate softball league. The American Youth Soccer Association was created in 1964 for boys but accepted girls in 1971 (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009).

Gender categorization seems to be built into and perpetuated within many youth sports cultures that rely on volunteer parents to support team activities. Fathers are invited to be assistant coaches, who assist with coaching/facilitating practices and games; whereas mothers are invited to be "team moms," who assist with schedule coordination, bringing snacks and other types of care-giving activities (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009). Even in contexts where the request is for a "team parent" rather than "team mom," it is rare that men assume this role. At times, female coaches resist implementing the role of a team parent, but they often carry the roles and responsibilities of that volunteer themselves, on top of the coaching responsibilities. This can result in excess workload/burden and adversely impact continued volunteerism (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009).

As of about 2010, the percentage of women coaches in collegiate and professional sports (compared to youth sports) was slightly higher for women's teams (43%) but still very low for men's teams (2–3%) (Walker & Bopp, 2010). This represented a decrease from about 90% of women's teams in 1972 at the passing of Title IX. A 2007 study found that in Division I sports, women coaches were more likely found at more prestigious, resource-rich institutions that also committed more resources to women's sports, indicating that intentional policies and resource allocation can impact representation (Welch & Sigelman, 2007). This trend continued and the percentage of women coaching teams at the Division I collegiate level remained stagnant at around 42% until 2021. In the last five years there has been a steady incline that is projected to reach 50% of women head coaches in the Select Seven NCAA D-I conferences within the next eight years (Goorevich et al., 2025). Additionally, the presence of a woman athletic director predicted more women

coaches. At this time the proportion of women coaches in Division I was about 44%, in Division II about 36% and Division III about 44%, which was lower than years previous (Welch & Sigelman, 2007). Interestingly, female coaches were more common in basketball and softball at these resource-rich institutions and less likely in less culturally popular sports like field hockey, lacrosse, track, and swimming. By 2017, female head coaches of women's sports is still only 43% (Staurowsky et al., 2020). It was largely unchanged by 2019 at 42%. Also indicated by the *Chasing Equity* report, athletic directors failed to utilize coach turnover as an opportunity to hire female coaches. Men were hired for more than half of 124 women's sports head coach vacancies (Staurowsky et al., 2020).

Of note, as of 2019, the proportion of collegiate sports coached by women does not appear to be related to US geography. A 2018–19 report graded NCAA Division I institutions on their representation of women head coaches. The distribution of female head coaches does not appear to follow any geographic pattern. There was variation by sport, with lacrosse, rugby, and equestrian sports having a large majority female head coaches and diving, water polo, cross country, track, swimming, and fencing being dominated by male coaches (LaVoi et al., 2019) (See Table B).

Table B: Grade by Sport for Percentage of Female D-I Head Coaches for 2018–19

Grade	%	Sport
A	100–70	Lacrosse (+92.9%), Rugby (85.7%)*, Field Hockey (84.2%), Equestrian (+83.3%)**
B	69–55	Softball (+67.2%), Triathlon (↑66.7%)*, Golf (–62.4%), Basketball (+61.1%), Gymnastics (↑57.1%)
C	54–40	Bowling (–50.0%), Volleyball (+47.4%), Rowing (↑41.4%), Rifle (–41.2%)**, Beach Volleyball (↑40.7%)
D	39–25	Tennis (+37.6%), Ice Hockey (+33.3%), Soccer (+28.4%), Water Polo (↑25.0%)
E	24–0	Diving (–21.6%), Cross Country (+20.8%), Nordic Skiing (20.0%)*, Squash (20.0%)*, Track (+18.8%), Swimming (–16.0%), Fencing (–14.8%), Alpine Skiing (9.1%)**

*Offered by 10 or fewer schools

** Offered by 20 or fewer schools

Conference decreased (–) or increased (+) percentage of women head coaches

Moved down (↓) or up (↑) a grade from 2017–18 to 2018–19.

Table 2 in LaVoi, N. M., Boucher, C. & Silbert, S. (2019). *Head coaches of women's collegiate teams: A comprehensive report on NCAA Division-I institutions, 2018-19. The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport.*



Welch and Sigelman (2007) offer some explanation of the decrease in female representation in coaching following the passage of Title IX. After 1972 it was a more desirable job to coach women's sports compared to previously. The growth in the number of women's sports teams outpaced the number of women candidates for coaching. Many coaching jobs had to be filled in schools that had not previously had women's teams. It became attractive for men to apply for these positions.

The same trend has occurred in Olympic Games coaching since 1972. Researchers in Great Britain indicate that 10% of 120 Olympic coaches are women in Great Britain (Jowett et al., 2022). Globally, 10% of coaches at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games were women, 11% at the 2012 Olympic Games, 9% at the 2014 Olympic Winter Games and 11% at the 2016 Olympic Games (Jowett et al., 2022). Similar to the United States, Finland, and Norway, about 43% of coaches in the UK are women, and they are more likely to coach at recreational levels rather than competitive athletes at regional levels or above (Murray et al., 2022). Women held just 41 (21.7%) of listed 189 coaching positions for the 2024 U.S. Olympic teams and 13 (24.5%) of 53 identifiable coaches for the 2024 U.S. Paralympic teams (Bass et al., 2025).

Trajectory of Women Coaches

The Aspen Institute's *State of Play 2022: Coaching Trends* report found that there remain disparities for women in coaching. If they can persist through the barriers in sports involvement, women who enter coaching often do not stay in coaching for as long as men. Numerous barriers, many similar to the barriers to sports participation, influence this trend. Compared to female coaches, male coaches were more likely to report an intention to continue coaching (extremely likely 67% vs. 60%). Also, female coaches responding to the survey tended to be less experienced

than male coaches. Thirty-six percent of female coaches had coached for 1–5 years compared to 27% of male coaches. Nearly half of men said they had coached for more than 10 years compared to 39% of women (Aspen Institute, 2022a).

Often times, for women to move forward and succeed in coaching, they must assume and perform behaviors typically conceptualized as masculine. This can mean asserting authority and control, proving oneself through physical demonstration, and attempting to “be one of the guys” (Murray et al., 2022).

In a 2016 study reporting on a survey of coaches, 65% of current coaches indicated it was easier for men to get the top-level coaching jobs and 75% reported that men could more easily negotiate salary increases. They also reported that men were more likely to be promoted, secure a multiyear contract, and receive salary increases for performance compared to women (Sabo et al., 2016).

Barriers Experienced by Women Aspiring Coaches

Similar to the **gender bias** experienced by girls in sports, female coaches experience gender bias in sports institutions and organizations. The sports industry continues to be male-dominated. As illustrated previously, even women's collegiate and professional sports leadership has become more male-dominated than prior to Title IX, in part due to the added legitimacy and thus desirability of working in those roles. Female coaches may feel alienated, devalued, isolated, and unwelcome in these spaces (Jowett et al., 2022).

In Division I coaching, the workloads tend to **not be family-friendly**, with substantial time commitments alongside aforementioned unclear or tumultuous career paths (Welch & Sigelman, 2007). Women, who often disproportionately bear the load of household responsibilities, experience difficulty balancing family and work responsibilities (Jowett et al., 2022). As reported by Welch and Sigelman (2007), less than a third of women coaches are married, and fewer than 1 out of 5 have children at home, compared to nearly half of women in the full-time workforce.

Walker and Bopp (2010) outline a list of deterrents and their associated evidence:

- a lack of **mentoring and role models**
- gender-role **stereotyping**
- **oversexualization and marginalization** of women by the media
- intention-related variables such as **interest and self-efficacy**
- **access to childcare**/supportive spouse/partner
- **preparation** (interviews, resumes, experience)

Methodology

Development of the Surveys

This survey was designed by Strength in Numbers Consulting Group (SiNCG) and Women's Sports Foundation (WSF). The literature review and findings from the qualitative research informed the development of the surveys.

Survey Outreach

YouGov, an online research data and analytics technology group, fielded the survey on their platform from January 2, 2024, to January 21, 2024.

For the coach survey, participants were eligible to take the survey if they met all of the following criteria:

- identified as an adult female between the ages of 18 and 64 years old,
- lived in Southeast Michigan (SEMI) or Western New York (WNY), and
- had experience currently or in the past with coaching or expressed interest in coaching.

The coach survey included questions related to coaching history, experiences with coaching, coaching training, and demographics.

For the youth survey, participants were eligible to take the survey if they met both of the following criteria:

- identified as a girl between the ages of 12 and 17 years old, and
- lived in SEMI or WNY.

Both participants who had experience playing organized sports (either currently or in the past) and those who have not played organized sports were eligible to take the survey. The youth survey included questions related to experiences playing organized sports and demographics.

The surveys were anonymous. All data are self-reported. The responses describe the perceptions of the survey participants, and, like all self-reported data, are limited in this way.

Data Analysis

To ensure that the samples for both surveys align with the US Census demographics for SEMI and WNY, YouGov used a process known as weighting. Weighting is used to ensure that the survey results, particularly the demographics of the surveys, align with the demographics of the regions. YouGov used the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates from 2022 for the weighting process. For the coach survey data, YouGov weighted the data to match the ACS ethnicity and county information. For the youth survey data, YouGov weighted the data to ensure that age was evenly distributed. Additionally, YouGov matched the county of residence within age groups (12–14 and 15–17) as well as ethnicity within age groups (12–14 and 15–17).

Quantitative data were analyzed in R, a commonly used statistical package for data analysis. Percentages described in this report use weighted data unless otherwise indicated. Statistical significance is reported where applicable for any statistical tests conducted. All statistics were checked by a second analyst.

To preserve anonymity and ensure that statistics are based on sufficient sample sizes, percentages with fewer than 20 participants in the denominator or five in the numerator are not shown. If one or more categories for a question has fewer than five individuals selecting that category, both that category and the next smallest one are suppressed in order to protect confidentiality. For data with two answer options (e.g., "yes" and "no"), if either category is less than five then the statistic cannot be calculated for either category. For example, if four people selected "yes" for a question and 96 people selected "no," this information would be indicated in the text as "fewer than five participants selected yes" or "nearly all participants selected no." Sample size criteria are applied to unweighted data.

Given these criteria, the coach survey findings are reported in aggregate whereas the youth survey findings are reported by region when these criteria are met.

Additionally, because of the use of weighted data, individual total numbers are not provided on graphs.

Overview

This report includes findings from both the survey focused on coaching (section titled [“Coach Survey Findings”](#)) and the survey focused on girls’ engagement in sports (section titled [“Youth Survey Findings”](#)).

This report is intended for multiple audiences, including practitioners in the Southeast Michigan and Western New York regions. Different audiences may read select sections of the report, so in some cases acronyms are written out multiple times to guide readers who may be reading only a particular section. For example, some readers may focus only on the “Coach Survey Findings” section, and others may focus only on the “Youth Survey Findings” section. Therefore, some background information is repeated in both sections to provide context for survey findings.

Additionally, to provide further context for survey findings, we include references to findings from the literature review and qualitative research of this research initiative. Quotes from the qualitative research can be found in the qualitative report (see [Appendix A](#)).



©Girls on the Run of Buffalo

Key Findings

Coach Survey Findings

1. **Women's motivations to coach youth sports include opportunities to mentor young people, connect with their community, and boost one's own health through physical activity.** Women emphasized that both community and individual benefits inform their engagement.
2. **The benefits of social connections associated with coaching may be experienced differently, depending on identity and experience.** Women of color had higher rates of agreement with coaching benefits related to community connection and getting to know other parents in the community. They also more frequently acknowledged the benefits of coaching for enhancing self-confidence.
3. **The most frequently reported negative experience while coaching is related to parent involvement.** More than half of former coaches agreed that parents gave too much direction, and more than two-thirds were uncomfortable with parents' interactions with them and/or the players.
4. **More than two thirds of respondents report that men do not show enough respect for women coaches.** Women who want to coach but are not yet involved believe that women coaches have a harder time than men, presenting a possible barrier for their involvement. Former coaches were also more likely to report that they didn't feel supported and felt isolated.
5. **Coaching training improves women's coaching experience and retention.** Current coaches reported receiving much more training than former coaches. Most reported receiving training locally, though about 43% of current coaches also had received training nationally. One third of current and former coaches actively sought out training opportunities on their own.
6. **Training that includes gender-sensitive coaching is perceived as highly valuable.** Current coaches were more likely to have received gender-sensitive coaching compared to former coaches, and all coaches reported interest in this type of training, specifically related to mental health, body issues, and menstrual cycles.
7. **Some of the greatest barriers to coaching include having too many other responsibilities, not having time, and/or not having a child who plays at the level they can coach.** Although these barriers are more difficult to mitigate, interested coaches reported that coach training would be incentivizing.
8. **Former coaches are more likely to return to coaching if the coaching conditions improve.** These improvements

include greater respect from team parents, having more confidence in their coaching skills, and having someone with whom to share responsibilities.

Youth Survey Findings

1. **Girls have mixed preferences and experiences related to playing on teams with or without boys.** More than 60% of respondents did not indicate a preference for or against playing on sports teams with boys. One third of respondents preferred to play on teams that did not include boys.
2. **Celebrations for boys-only sports/teams (e.g., parades, pep rallies and other community/school celebrations) are more common than celebrations for girls-only sports/teams.**
3. **Current players self-identify as athletes.** Seventy to 80% of girls currently playing a sport identified themselves as athletes and agreed that others would describe them as athletes.
4. **Playing sports is associated with enjoying competition.** Current sports participants were more likely than former sports participants and those who never participated in sports to enjoy competition, reporting that competing allows them to discover their full potential. However, there are mixed feelings related to competition. When sports feel too competitive, it dissuades some girls from engaging or sustaining their involvement.
5. **Social connection is central to playing sports.** Girls enjoy spending time with friends while playing sports and appreciate the support that comes from their coaches.
6. **Girls value having a safe sport environment that includes private places to change and access to adequate hydration.**
7. **Girls report that boys do attend girls' sports games and practices.** Around half of respondents indicated that boys often or always attend the games and just over 20% said that boys often or always watch the team practice.
8. **Top reasons for stopping play include: too much schoolwork, wanting to do a different activity more than sports, and not being able to attend practice regularly.** Other reasons include: the cost of sport and not having fun.
9. **When girls have adult encouragement to play sports, they are more likely to participate.** Most current sports participants reported that they have a parent or guardian as well as a non-parent adult who encourage them to play.

Coach Survey Findings

This section of the report describes aggregated findings from both regions for the coach survey due to sample size considerations. For more information about sample size considerations, please see the [“Methods”](#) section.

Demographics of Coach Survey Participants

A total of 211 adults completed the survey. In terms of age of the survey participants:

- 15.6% were 18–24 years old,
- 23.4% were aged 25–34 years old,
- 26.9% were aged 35–44 years old,
- 22.2% were aged 45–54 years old, and
- 11.8% were aged 55–64 years old.

Nearly all participants identified as women (versus men or nonbinary). In terms of sexual orientation, the breakdown of responses was as follows:

- 85.5% identified as heterosexual/straight,
- 9.3% identified as bisexual, and
- 4.8% identified as a lesbian/gay woman.

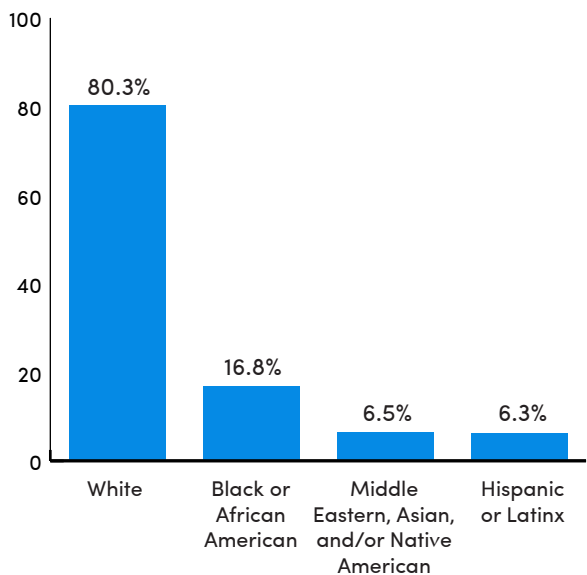
A majority (87.0%) did not identify as a person living with a physical disability, while more than one in 10 (13.0%) either identified or were not sure if they identified as a person living with a physical disability.

About three-fourths (75.9%) of participants identified as White, and 24.1% identified as people of color (POC) (see Figure 1). Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided. Those who only selected White as their race are included in the White category. Participants who selected multiple races, including those who selected White as one race, are included in the POC category. About four-fifths (80.3%) selected White; over a seventh (16.8%) selected Black or African American; 6.5% identified as Middle Eastern, Asian, or Native American; and 6.3% selected Hispanic or Latinx.

Over half (52.6%) of participants reported a total annual household income of \$74,999 or less before taxes (see Figure 2).

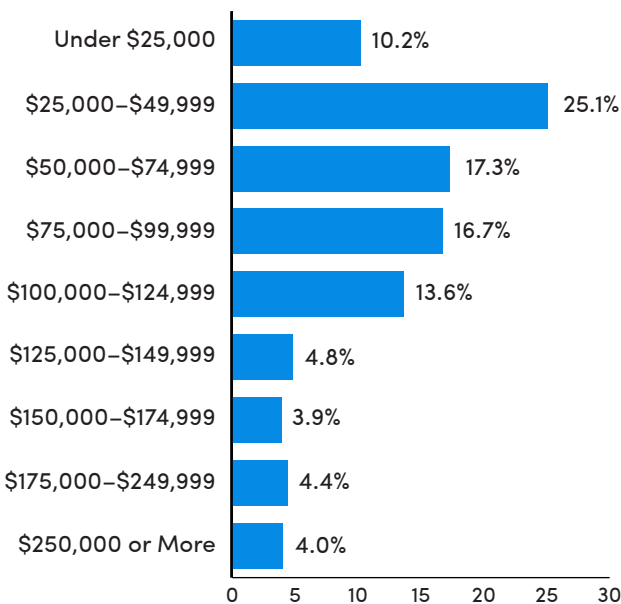
Of the total 211 adults participating in the survey, 146 (69.2%) were from the Southeast Michigan (SEMI) region and 65 (30.8%) were from the Western New York (WNY) region.

Figure 1: Race/Ethnicity of Coach Participants



Note: Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided.

Figure 2: Annual Household Income of Coach Participants



Among the 146 adults from the SEMI region:

- 34.0% lived in Wayne County,
- 30.4% in Oakland County,
- 17.0% in Macomb County,
- 9.5% in Washtenaw county,
- 5.6% in Monroe or St. Claire County, and
- 3.5% in Livingston County.

More than half (57.8%) of adults lived in a suburb, over one-fourth (28.3%) lived in a city, while much smaller segments lived in towns (7.2%) or rural areas (6.8%).

In terms of race/ethnicity of SEMI survey participants, nearly three-fourths (73.5%) identified as White, and one-fifth (20.9%) identified as Black or African American (see Figure 3).

Among the 65 adults from the WNY region:

- 61.5% lived in Erie County,
- 12.3% in Niagara County,
- 9.2% in Chautauqua County,
- 9.2% in Genesee, Orleans, or Wyoming County, and
- 7.7% in Cattaraugus County.

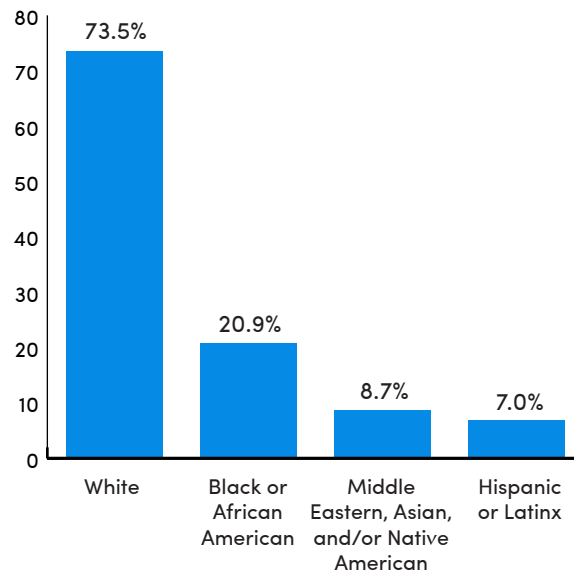
A third (33.8%) lived in a suburb, while 30.8% lived in a city, 23.1% lived in a rural area, and 12.3% lived in a town.

In terms of race/ethnicity of WNY survey participants, the majority (95.4%) identified as White and 9.2% as Black/African American, Middle Eastern, Asian, Native American, and/or Hispanic/Latinx (see Figure 4). POC categories are reported in aggregate due to the small number in each category.

The survey also included a question about gender expression, which is defined as “the external presentation of an individual’s gender-related attributes” and “is distinct from gender identity, which refers to an individual’s internal sense of gender” (Gill & Frazer, 2016). Participants were asked to describe their appearance, style, and how they dress in terms of both feminine gender expression and masculine gender expression with a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all feminine/masculine) to 5 (very feminine/masculine).

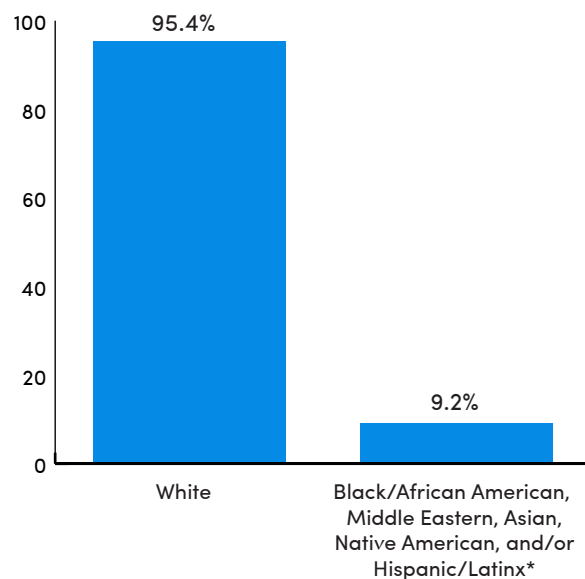
Figure 5 (on following page) shows that masculine gender expression among survey participants was relatively low, with over two-thirds (67.6%) selecting “not at all” or “slightly masculine.” Feminine gender expression was relatively high among survey participants, with over two-thirds (68.1%) selecting “mostly” or “very feminine.”

Figure 3: Race/Ethnicity of Southeast Michigan Coach Participants



Note: Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided.

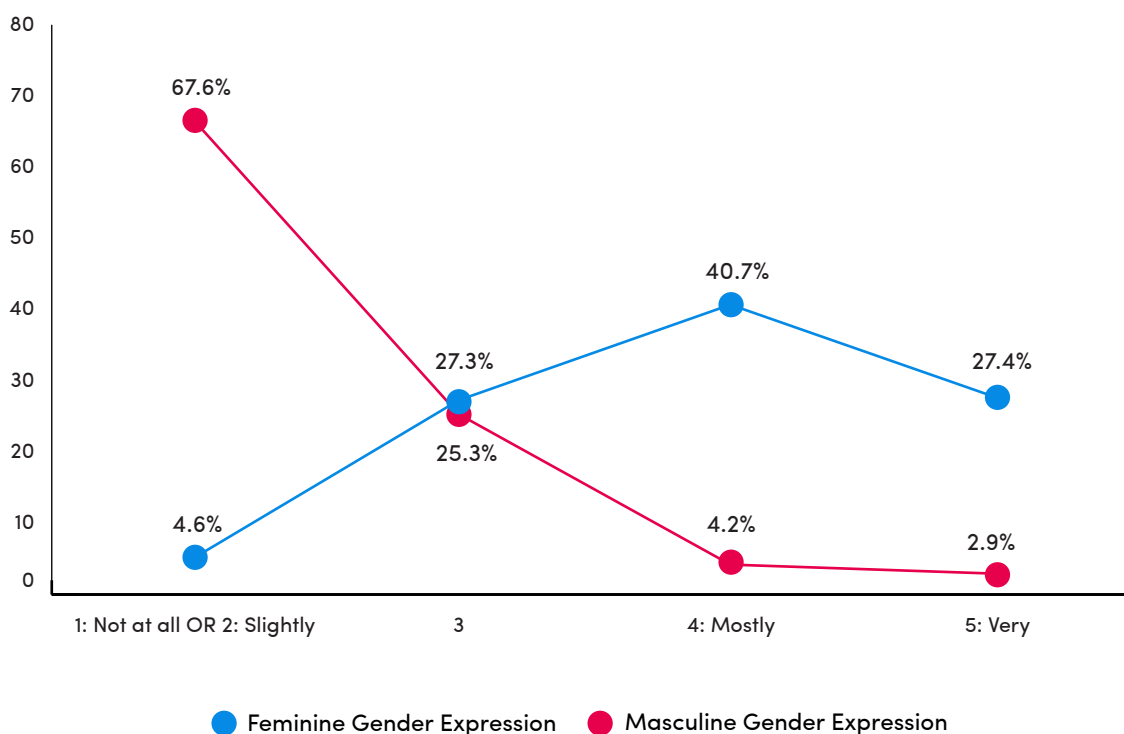
Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity of Western New York Coach Participants



Notes: Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided.

**POC categories are reported in aggregate due to the small number in each category.*

Figure 5. Gender Expression of Coach Survey Participants



This information can be contextualized by findings from the literature review phase of this research (see pages 9–24). Coaching sports is an activity that may be considered to be coded “masculine,” meaning that women coaches may benefit from exhibiting behaviors typically conceptualized as masculine. Examples include asserting authority and control, proving oneself through physical demonstration, and attempting to “be one of the guys” (Murray et al., 2022). Therefore, fewer women coaches may describe their gender expression as very feminine.

Section 1: Experience with Coaching and Sports

This section includes information about survey participants’ experiences related to coaching.

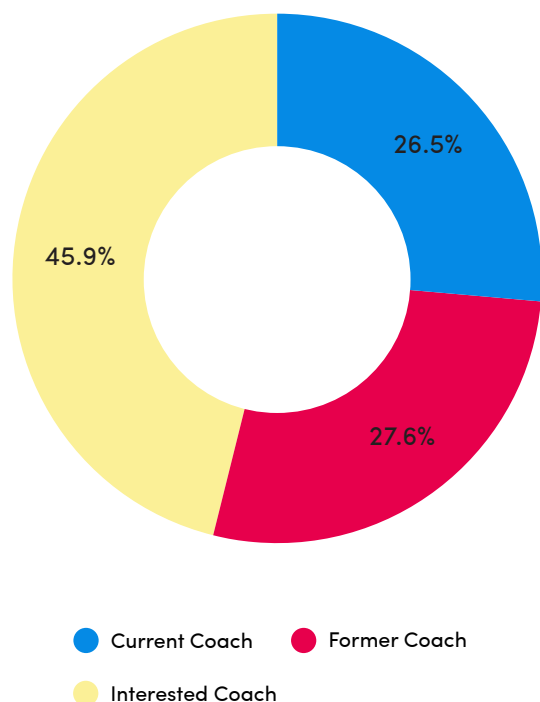
Both those who have experience with coaching, either currently or in the past, and those who have never coached were asked about their interest in coaching a local youth sports team. We created three mutually distinct categories, meaning that if a survey participant indicated that they currently coach a local youth sports team, they were classified as a current coach in this report. If a survey participant indicated that they have not

coached a local youth sports team in the past year but have in the past 10 years, they were classified as a former coach. If a survey participant indicated that they have never coached a local youth sports team and are somewhat or very interested in coaching, they were classified as an interested coach. If a survey participant who is categorized as a current coach or former coach also indicated they are somewhat or very interested in coaching, they were included only in the current coach or former coach category, respectively.

Over two-fifths (45.9%) of the survey participants did not have previous coaching experience but were interested in coaching (“interested coaches”), with the remainder relatively evenly split between those who have coached sometime in the past 10 years but not in the past year (27.6%, “former coaches”) and those who currently coach (26.5%, “current coaches”) (see Figure 6 on following page).

The median age of current coaches was 33 years, the median age of former coaches was 42 years, and the median age of interested coaches was 38 years.

Figure 6: Coach Status of Survey Participants



Current coaches and former coaches were asked about their title in their current or most recent coaching role. Participants could select multiple options if they were coaching more than one sport and have more than one role. Results were as follows:

- 62.0% were assistant coaches,
- 46.8% were head coaches, and
- 11.2% held other titles.

Former coaches were asked when the last time was that they coached for at least 3 months or for a full season of a sport. The responses were nearly evenly split among participants:

- 23.7% coached less than 2 years ago,
- 25.4% coached 2-3 years ago,
- 23.6% coached 4-5 years ago, and
- 27.3% coached more than 5 years ago.

Participants who were current coaches or former coaches who had coached in the last 5 years were asked questions about their experience with coaching. These participants were asked how frequently they were coaching as a volunteer or as a paid coach in the past 5 years. The majority (65.1%) indicated that they coached as a volunteer all of the time (see Figure 7). No participants indicated that they were paid as a coach all of the time.

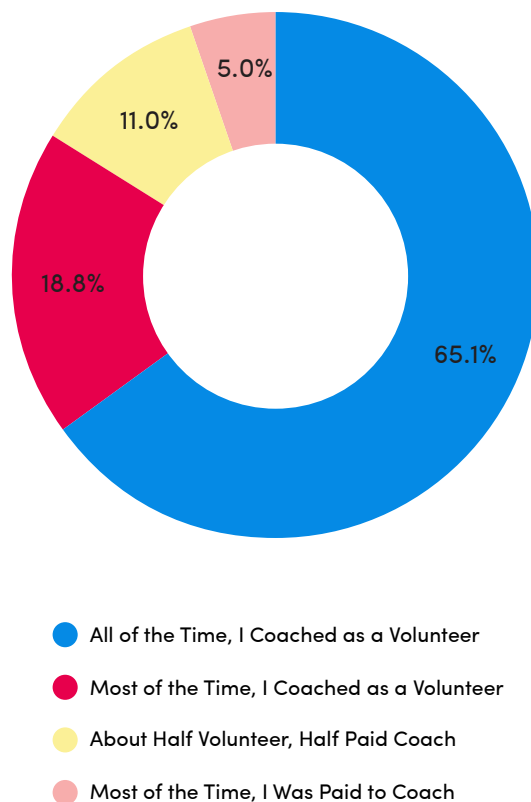
Participants provided the demographics of the teams that they had coached or currently coach in the past 5 years, with the option to select as many as applicable:

- More than half (56.9%) have coached mixed-gender teams,
- 40.3% have coached girls-only teams, and
- 22.9% have coached boys-only teams.

The age groups that survey participants had coached in the past 5 years, listed in order of most commonly selected to least commonly selected were:

- 55.5% coached 5- to 8-year-olds,
- 52.5% coached 9- to 12-year-olds,
- 38.4% coached 13- to 14-year-olds,
- 26.9% coached 15- to 17-year-olds, and
- 16.2% coached those under 5 years old.

Figure 7: Current or Former Coaches' Experience Being Paid and/or Volunteering to Coach



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

In terms of how frequently survey participants had coached teams that included their own children in the past five years:

- nearly two-fifths (39.3%) have all of the time,
- 30.7% have some of the time,
- 5.1% have a little bit of the time, and
- 24.9% have none of the time.

All participants, regardless of coaching experience, were asked about whether they had played sports at different levels. Participants could choose as many options as applicable. The most commonly selected response was youth sports (70.2%), followed by high school sports (66.0%) and college sports (20.5%).

Section 2: Facilitators and Barriers

This section includes information about facilitators and barriers to coaching. Statements related to facilitators and barriers were chosen based on WSF's work with coaches over decades, including informal and formal focus groups in which coaches have talked about their coaching experiences. These statements were also informed by interviews and semi-structured surveys with current and former coaches that SiNCG did in 2023 as part of the qualitative phase of this research.

Facilitators for Coaching

This section explores the following research question:

What are the benefits of coaching (e.g., mentorship of younger people, community connectedness) that could be promoted, reinforced, or amplified to encourage participation and retention in coaching? Does this vary by race (POC vs. not) or coach status (current coach vs. former coach)?

Current coaches and former coaches were presented with 12 statements related to reasons for why they coach, and they were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Half of the statements focused on community-related benefits of coaching, and the other half focused on personal benefits of coaching.

Participants were presented with the following options for each statement: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Figures 8 and 9 (on this and following page) show the percentage of participants who either strongly agreed or agreed with each statement by coach status.

Figure 8: Agreement with Statements About Community-Related Benefits of Coaching

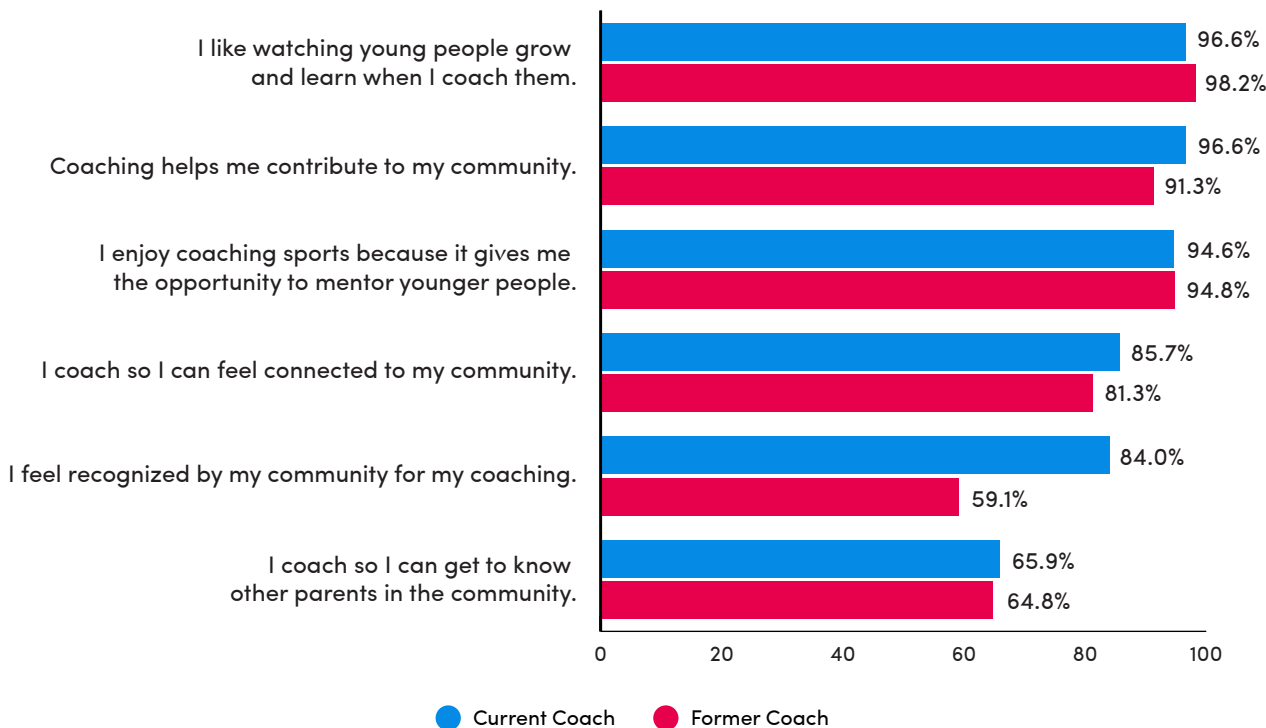
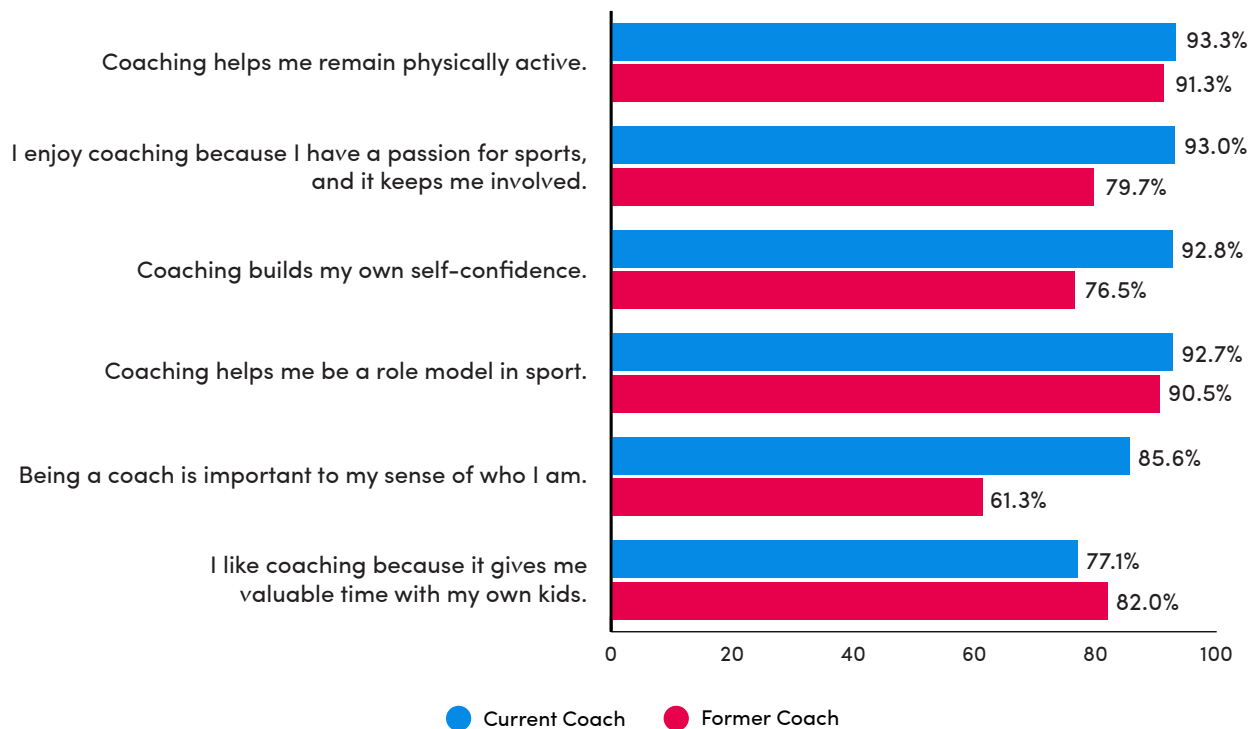


Figure 9: Agreement with Statements About Personal Benefits of Coaching



The six statements focused on community-related benefits for coaching were:

1. I enjoy coaching sports because it gives me the opportunity to mentor younger people.
2. I coach so I can get to know other parents in the community.
3. I coach so I can feel connected to my community.
4. Coaching helps me contribute to my community.
5. I like watching young people grow and learn when I coach them.
6. I feel recognized by my community for my coaching.

The six statements focused on personal benefits for coaching were:

1. I enjoy coaching because I have a passion for sports and it keeps me involved.
2. I like coaching because it gives me valuable time with my own kids.
3. Coaching builds my own self-confidence.
4. Being a coach is important to my sense of who I am.
5. Coaching helps me be a role model in sport.
6. Coaching helps me remain physically active.



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Overall, most current coaches and former coaches tended to agree with the statements.

Figure 10 shows the top five statements for which over 90% of both current coaches and former coaches agreed or strongly agreed. Those statements were:

1. I like watching young people grow and learn when I coach them.
2. Coaching helps me contribute to my community.
3. I enjoy coaching sports because it gives me the opportunity to mentor younger people.
4. Coaching helps me remain physically active.
5. Coaching helps me be a role model in sport.

This information suggests that opportunities to work with, mentor, and see young people grow are key facilitators for coaching. In response to an open-ended question in the survey asking about what would make them more likely to coach, some participants shared that it is deeply rewarding and fulfilling to help youth develop in sports and see them thrive. Furthermore, in the qualitative phase of this research, women coaches spoke about how they wanted to coach because of the power that coaches can have in shaping kids' sports experiences.

Over 90% of current coaches also strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoy coaching because they have a passion for sports that keeps them involved as well as that coaching builds their own self confidence. This information suggests that these opportunities for personal development are a facilitator for coaching among current coaches.

We also examined differences in how survey participants answered this question by race and coach status. Findings that are interesting, relevant, and statistically significant are reported below.

The following information in Figures 11 and 12 (on following page) shows the percentage of coaches of color and White coaches who strongly agreed with the statements. Additional information is included on odds ratios, which allow us to compare how much more likely coaches of color were to strongly agree with the statements than White coaches.

As shown in Figure 11, compared to White coaches, a higher percentage of coaches of color strongly agreed that feeling connected to their community (51.0%) and getting to know other parents in the community (40.7%) are reasons why they coach.

Furthermore, coaches of color were one and a half times more likely than White coaches to both strongly agree that getting to know parents in the community ($OR = 2.89$, $p = 0.028$) and strongly agree that feeling connected to their community ($OR = 2.66$, $p = 0.034$) are reasons for why they coach. These two community-related benefits focus on social connection as a reason for coaching and suggest that perhaps opportunities to connect with others in the community is an important facilitator for coaching among coaches of color.

As shown in Figure 12, among coaches of color, over half strongly agreed that being a coach is important to their sense of who they are (59.3%) and that coaching builds their own self confidence (55.7%). A higher percentage of coaches of color than White coaches strongly agreed with each of these statements.

Figure 10: Top 5 Reasons for Coaching That Over 90% of Current and Former Coaches Agree With

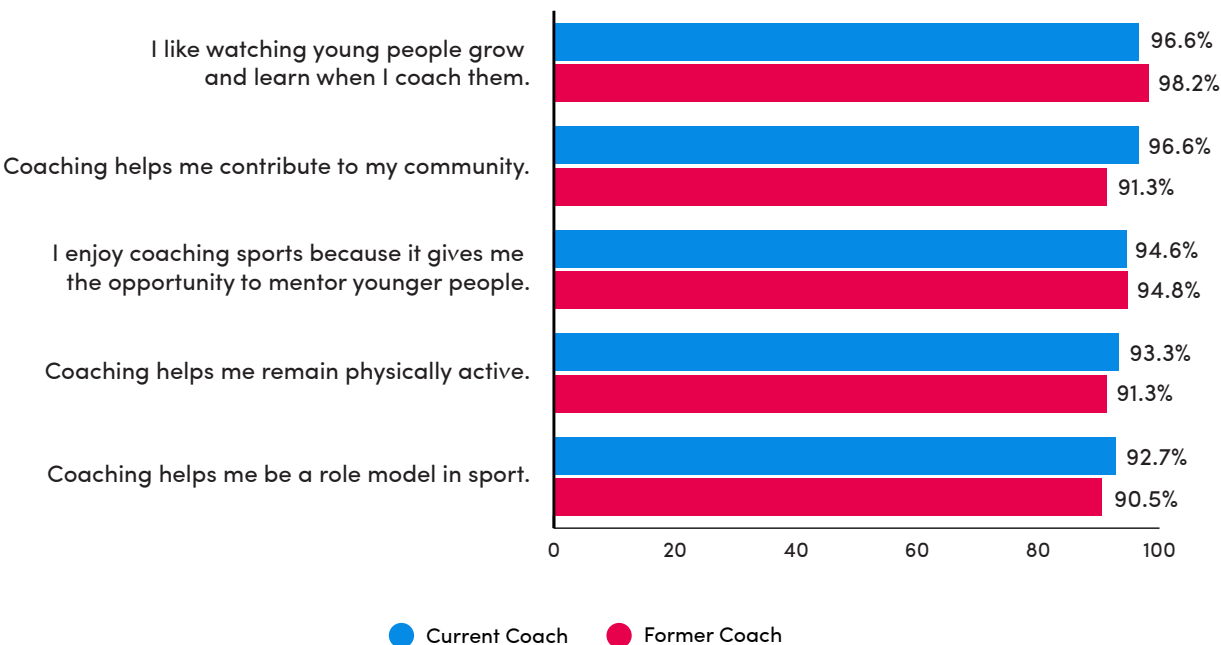
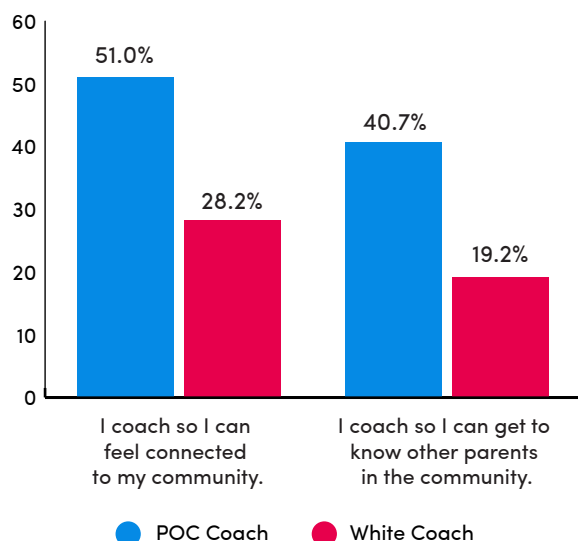
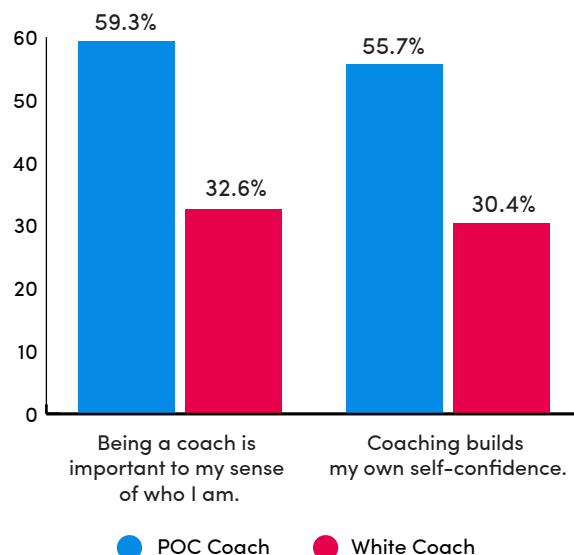


Figure 11: Strong Agreement with Statements About Community-Related Benefits of Coaching by Race



In fact, coaches of color were two times more likely than White coaches to strongly agree that being a coach is important to their sense of who they are ($OR = 3.02$, $p = 0.017$), and that coaching builds their own self confidence ($OR = 2.88$, $p = 0.022$) (see Figure 12). These two personal benefits focus on ways in which coaching can bolster confidence, especially for coaches of color.

Figure 12: Strong Agreement with Statements About Personal Benefits of Coaching by Race



Barriers to Coaching

This section explores the following research question:

What are the barriers to coaching (e.g., not feeling confident or skilled) and negative events that affect participation in coaching?

Current coaches and former coaches were presented with a list of seven negative events that may have happened to them while coaching and asked to indicate how often those events may have happened to them while coaching. The statements were:

1. I felt overwhelmed by the demands of coaching.
2. I was uncomfortable with how the parents interacted with me or the players.
3. Parents gave too much direction.
4. I didn't feel supported.
5. I felt isolated.
6. It was very hard to navigate conflict among players.
7. It was very hard to manage the emotional and mental health issues of players.

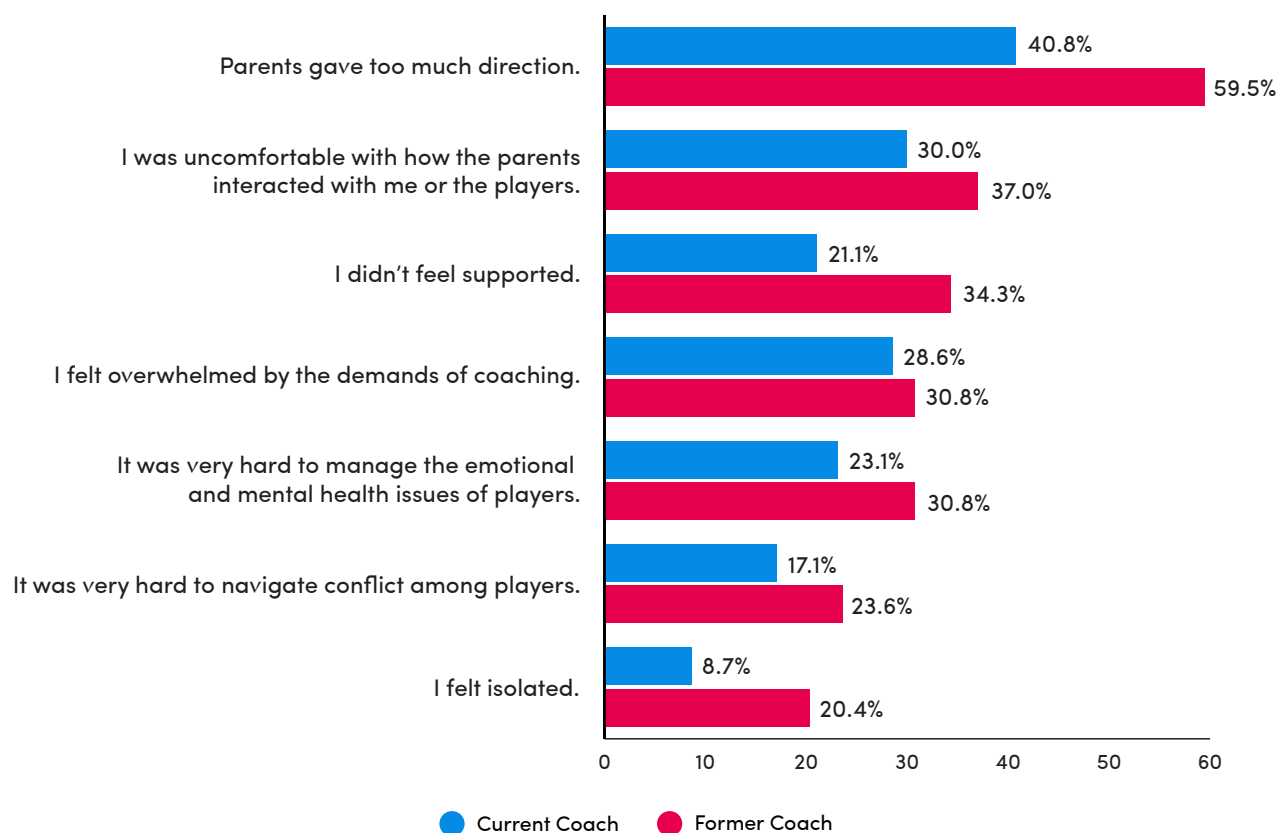
Participants were presented with the following options for each statement: never, rarely, sometimes, and often. Figure 13 (on following page) shows the percentage of participants who selected either "sometimes" or "often" for each statement by coach status.

Overall, a higher percentage of former coaches than current coaches indicated that they have experienced these negative events sometimes or often. While it is not possible to definitively



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Figure 13: Negative Events That Occurred Sometimes or Often While Coaching



establish whether there is a causal relationship between quitting coaching and having negative experiences, this suggests that some coaches who have large numbers of negative experiences may be more likely to quit coaching — a challenging but remediable problem.

The most common events that occurred sometimes or often for both current coaches and former coaches are parents giving too much direction (40.8% and 59.5%, respectively) and feeling uncomfortable with the how the parents interacted with them or with the players (30.0% and 37.0%, respectively).

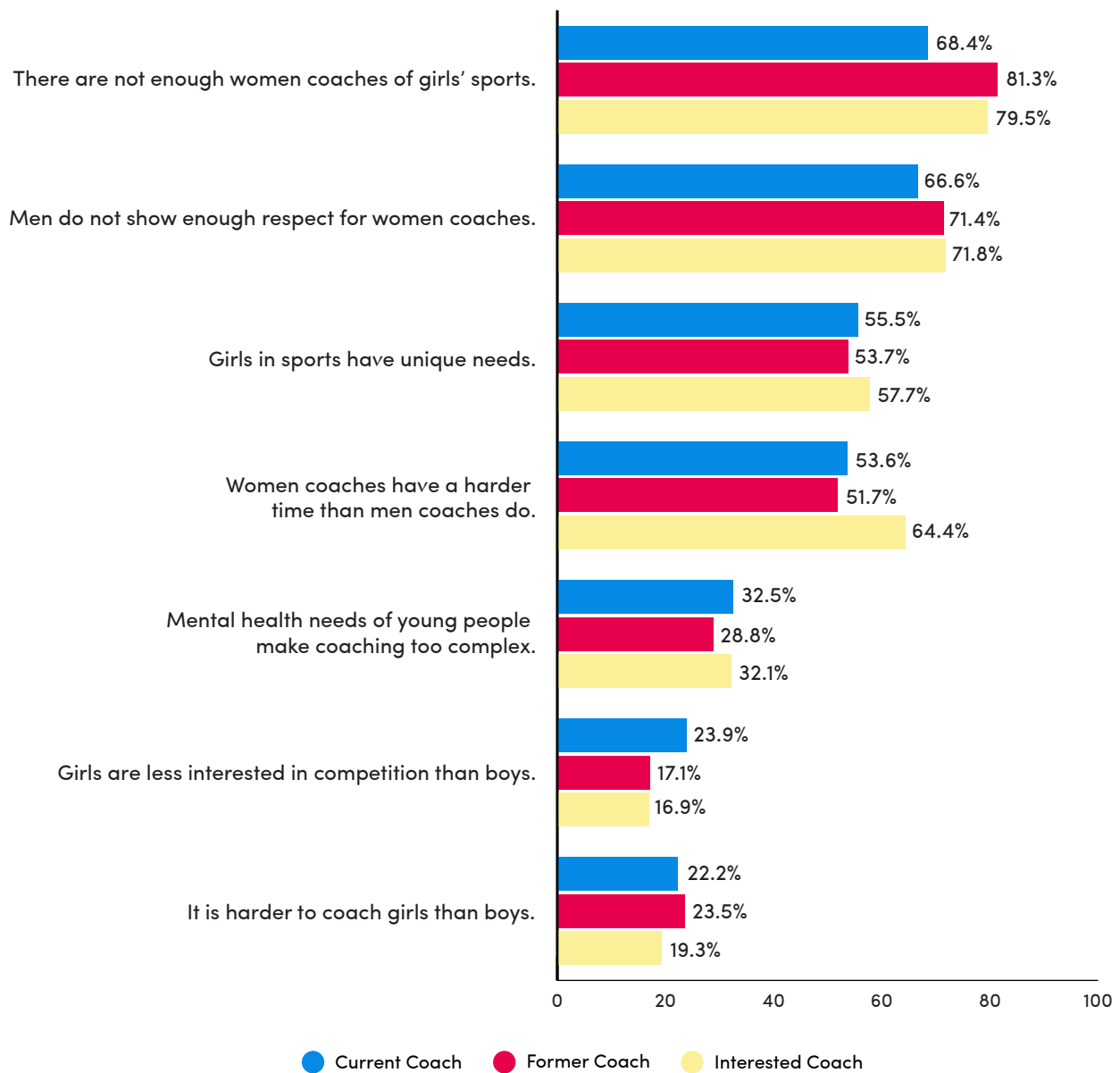
This information suggests that interactions with parents while coaching can create negative experiences for coaches. Furthermore, in the qualitative research findings, a common challenge that women coaches discussed was feeling that their expertise was at times questioned by parents, often in the form of unsolicited advice. This aligns with some responses to the open-ended question in the survey about what would make survey participants more likely to coach. Some participants shared that they wanted to receive “less input” from parents while coaching and would like for parents to better support their children in sports.

All participants regardless of coaching status were presented with seven statements related to thoughts on coaching and asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. The statements were:

1. Girls in sports have unique needs.
2. It is harder to coach girls than boys.
3. There are not enough women coaches of girls' sports.
4. Men do not show enough respect for women coaches.
5. Women coaches have a harder time than men coaches do.
6. Girls are less interested in competition than boys.
7. Mental health needs of young people make coaching too complex.

Participants were presented with the following options for each statement: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Figure 14 (on following page) shows the percentage of participants who selected “agree” or “strongly agree” by coach status.

Figure 14: Agreement With Thoughts Toward Coaching



The two statements with which the highest percentage of current coaches, former coaches, and interested coaches agreed or strongly agreed were:

1. There are not enough women coaches of girls' sports (68.4% of current coaches, 81.3% of former coaches, and 79.5% of interested coaches).
2. Men do not show enough respect for women coaches (66.6% of current coaches, 71.4% of former coaches, and 71.8% of interested coaches).

The statement about men not showing enough respect for women coaches is informed by findings from the literature review and qualitative research phases. Existing literature suggests that female coaches experience gender bias in sports institutions and organizations, especially given that the sports industry continues to be male-dominated. As a result, they may feel alienated, devalued, isolated, and unwelcome (Jowett et al., 2022). In the qualitative research, women spoke about how they felt that their expertise was questioned by administration, parents, and coaches, which they think wouldn't happen if they were men.

A higher percentage of interested coaches (64.4%) than current coaches (53.6%) and former coaches (51.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that women coaches have a harder time than men coaches do. Furthermore, interviews and surveys with current and former coaches in the qualitative research phases found that many women don't feel qualified to coach even when they have the same level of experience as their male counterparts because they may not see themselves as coaches. Additionally, women from underserved backgrounds face more barriers to entering coaching, such as having less access to sports opportunities or less opportunities to see themselves as coaches. This information suggests that these perceptions about the experience of women coaches may be a barrier preventing interested coaches from coaching and that addressing these perceptions could encourage more interested coaches to coach.

Coaching Training

This section explores the following research questions:

- How much training have coaches experienced?
How much and what kind of coaching training do they want?
- What do coaches and prospective coaches believe about the gender-specific needs of girls in coaching?

Former coaches and current coaches were asked about their experience receiving training and/or support related to coaching. Among current coaches, over two-thirds (71.1%) have received at least 5 hours of training, with over one-fourth

(26.0%) having received more than 20 hours of training (see Figure 15). Among former coaches, nearly two-thirds (63.1%) have received less than 5 hours of training or no training at all. Overall, current coaches have received more hours of training than former coaches.

Former coaches and current coaches who received any training or support at all were asked a series of questions about their experience. Two-thirds (66.9%) of current coaches received training less than or 2 years ago, and over two-thirds of former coaches (71.7%) received training 3 or more years ago. In terms of where they have received training materials:

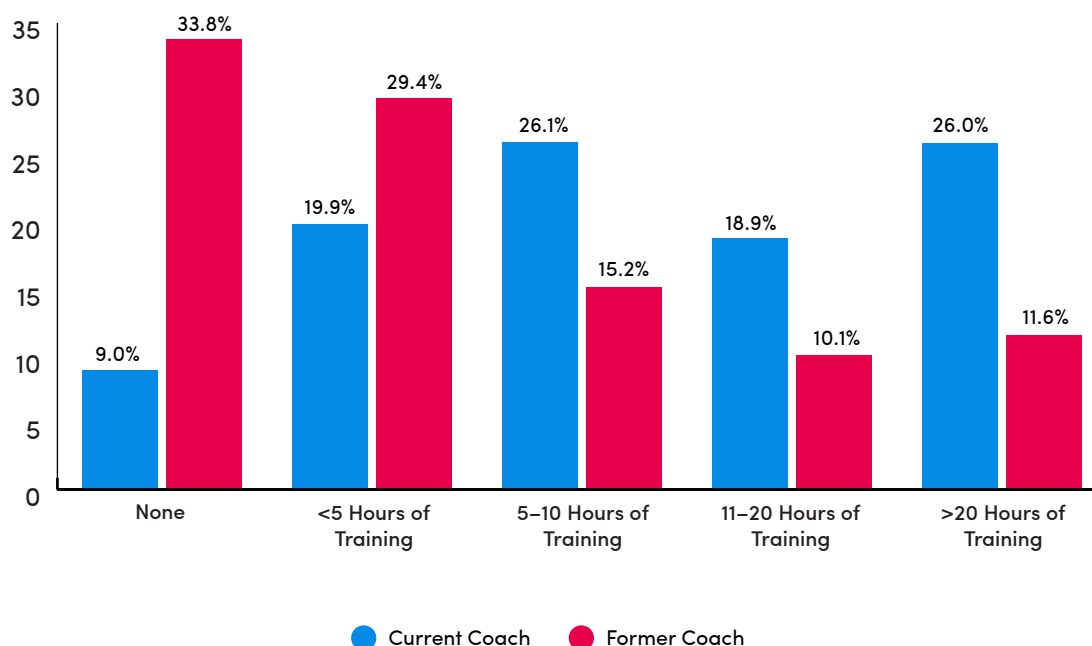
- 94.7% of former coaches and 92.3% of current coaches received training materials locally.
- 42.6% of current coaches received training materials nationally.

Regarding how they found the trainings they participated in:

- 86.3% of current coaches and 67.1% of former coaches were offered training.
- 36.6% of current coaches and 35.5% of former coaches sought out training on their own.

In terms of receiving training or information on how to coach girls specifically or how to do gender-sensitive coaching, nearly half (49.4%) of current coaches have received this kind of training compared to less than one-fifth (15.0%) of former coaches. Training for gender-informed approaches for coaching ranges from specific training to coach young people who

Figure 15: Lifetime Coaching Training and/or Support Received

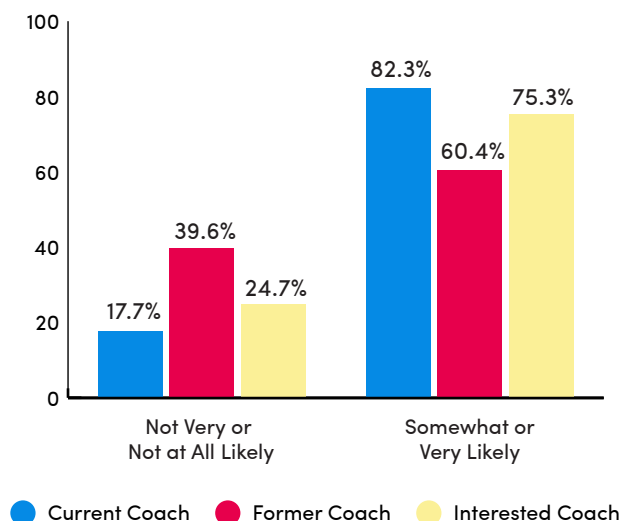




identify as female as well as acknowledging that gender is not binary. Coaches are in a position to demonstrate to youth that all genders deserve to be included in sports, counterbalancing prominent cultural messages suggesting the contrary.

All participants regardless of coach status were asked how likely they would be to attend a free training on coaching girls specifically or in gender-sensitive coaching. Most of the current coaches (82.3%), interested coaches (75.3%), and former coaches (60.4%) indicated they would be very likely or somewhat likely to attend (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Likelihood to Attend a Free Training on Coaching Girls or Gender-Sensitive Coaching



In response to an open-ended question in the survey about what participants would need to help them address the unique needs of girls in sports, some participants mentioned wanting more training, resources, and education. Resources in which they were interested included more information and education about mental health, body issues and disordered eating, and menstrual cycles. These topics are, in fact, gender-sensitive. Additionally, a few respondents shared that support and mentorship from others within the coaching community would be helpful, such as opportunities to observe coaches with more experience to understand their coaching style.

It is also important to note that some participants in the open-ended responses indicated that girls do not have unique needs. Others described how girls in sports need a strong support system, including support from coaches, parents, and the community. Some participants mentioned how girls need more encouragement and support from coaches compared to boys, with one participant commenting that coaches should “emphasize the importance of teamwork and friendship and create a supportive team environment where girls feel accepted and encouraged.” A few participants noted that parental involvement is important and that it’s helpful for parents to encourage girls to play sports without making it feel like it’s “too much stress for something that’s supposed to be fun.” A couple of participants mentioned how larger community involvement, such as attending girls’ games, could be helpful in supporting girls’ engagement in sports.

As seen above, there is a high level of interest overall in training focused on coaching girls or gender-sensitive coaching, which offers an opportunity to address factors that are unique to girls playing sports.

Section 3: Behavioral Intentions

This section includes information about survey participants’ intentions to coach as well as potential facilitators and barriers influencing that intention. The following research question is explored in this section:

What are the facilitators and barriers that affect intention to coach a sport in the next 12 months?

All participants regardless of coach status were asked about their likelihood to coach a sport in the next 12 months.

Nearly all current coaches selected very likely or somewhat likely, so Table 1 only shows the breakdown of responses for former coaches and interested coaches given sample size considerations. Please see the “[Methodology](#)” section for more information about sample size considerations.

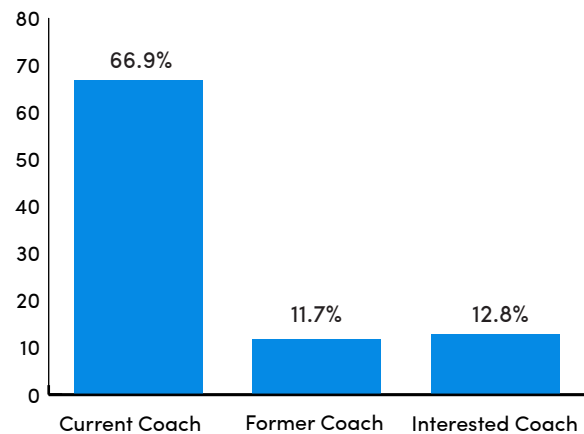
Table 1. Likelihood to Coach a Sport in the Next 12 Months by Coach Status

	Former Coach	Interested Coach
Very Likely	11.7%	12.8%
Somewhat Likely	33.7%	33.2%
Not Very Likely	37.2%	40.7%
Not at all Likely	17.4%	13.2%

Overall, most current coaches (66.9%) reported that they were very likely to coach in the next 12 months whereas only slightly more than one-tenth of former coaches (11.7%) and interested coaches (12.8%) indicated the same (see Figure 17).

Participants who selected “not very likely” or “not at all likely” were presented with a list of reasons that might explain why they are not likely to coach in the next 12 months and were asked to select as many of the reasons as applicable. These reasons were informed by findings from the qualitative research phase of this study. This question was predominantly answered by former coaches and interested coaches. Former and interested coaches who were not very likely or not all likely to coach were similar in their response patterns in that among both the three most commonly selected reasons were:

Figure 17: Very Likely to Coach a Sport in the Next 12 Months



- having too many other responsibilities (58.6% and 50.9%, respectively)
- not having time or being too busy (49.5% and 54.4%, respectively)
- not having a child who plays at a level that they can coach (35.0% and 42.1%, respectively) (see Figures 18 and 19 on this and following page)

Figure 18: Reasons Interested Coaches Gave for Being Not Very Likely or Not at all Likely to Coach in the Next 12 Months

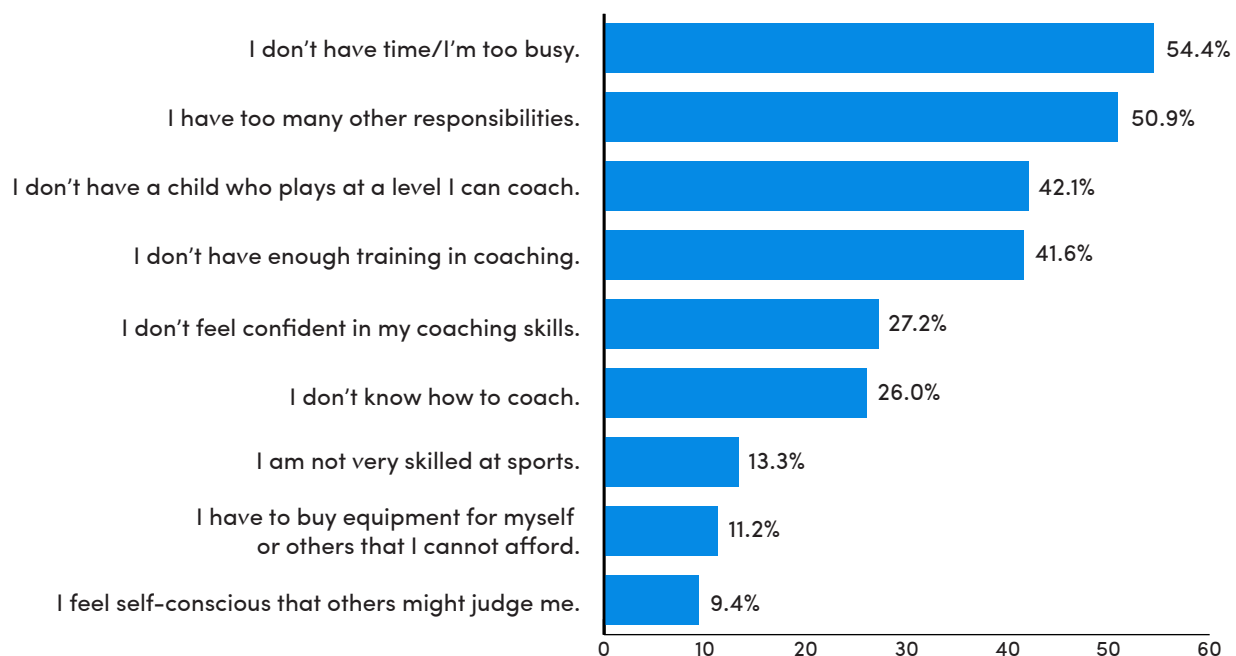
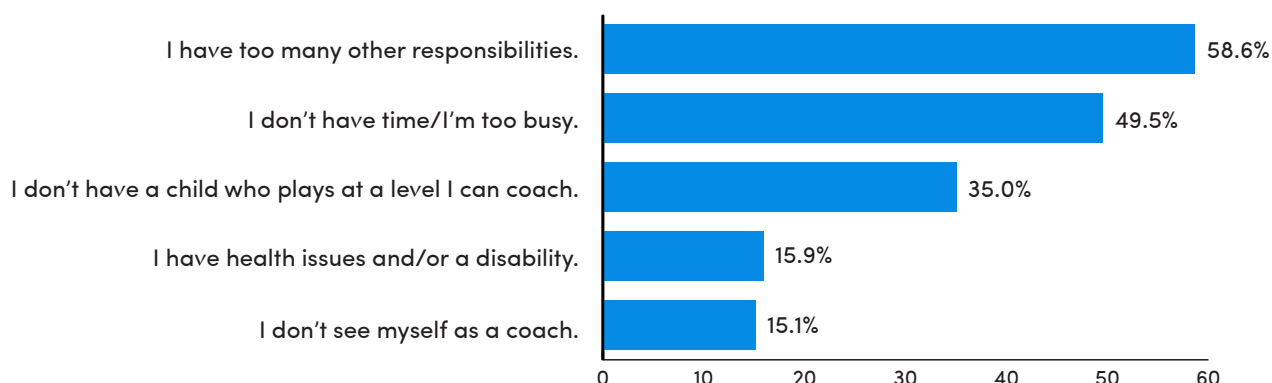


Figure 19: Reasons Former Coaches Gave for Being Not Very Likely or Not at all Likely to Coach in the Next 12 Months



In response to an open-ended question in the survey asking about what would make them more likely to coach, some respondents mentioned that work commitments and childcare are two factors that limit their availability. This information aligns with the qualitative research findings in which the most common challenge women coaches mentioned was balancing coaching responsibilities and schedules with professional and personal commitments, especially in terms of childcare. Perhaps offering resources, such as childcare, would support in addressing the barriers of time, availability, and competing responsibilities.

Though these barriers can be challenging to address, it is important to note that among interested coaches:

- Over two-fifths (41.6%) selected that not having enough training is a reason not to coach.
- Over one-fourth indicated that not knowing how to coach (26.0%) and not feeling confident with coaching skills (27.2%) were reasons not to coach.

This information suggests that offering training and skill-building opportunities for interested coaches could support them in being more likely to coach in the next 12 months.

Additionally, 15.1% of former coaches also indicated that not seeing themselves as a coach is why they are not very likely or not at all likely to coach in the 12 months.

Former coaches who selected “not very likely” or “not at all likely” were presented with potential reasons that might help make it more likely for them to coach in the next 12 months and asked to select as many as applicable. The most commonly selected factor, with over half (55.7%) of former coaches selecting this option, was “having more time” (see Figure 20 on following page).

While this factor is challenging to address, it is helpful to note that about one-fifth of former coaches also indicated that the following factors might help make them more likely to coach in the next 12 months:

- having team parents be more respectful (20.4%)
- feeling more skilled at the sport itself (20.4%)
- having an assistant or co-coach to share some of the responsibilities (19.9%)
- being paid or paid better (19.0%)

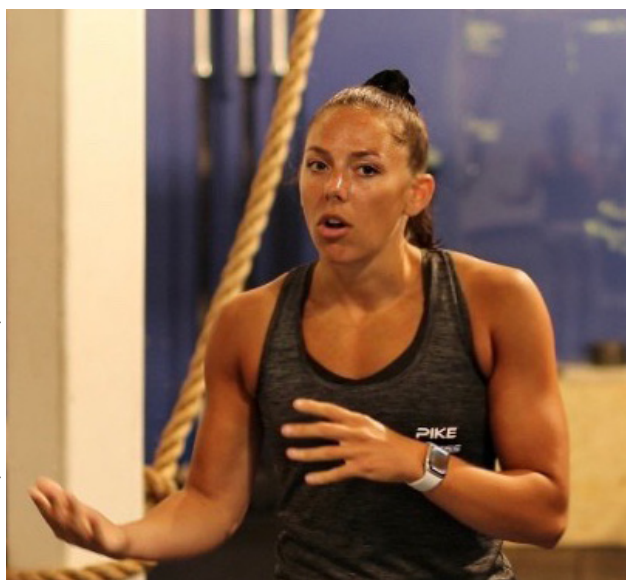
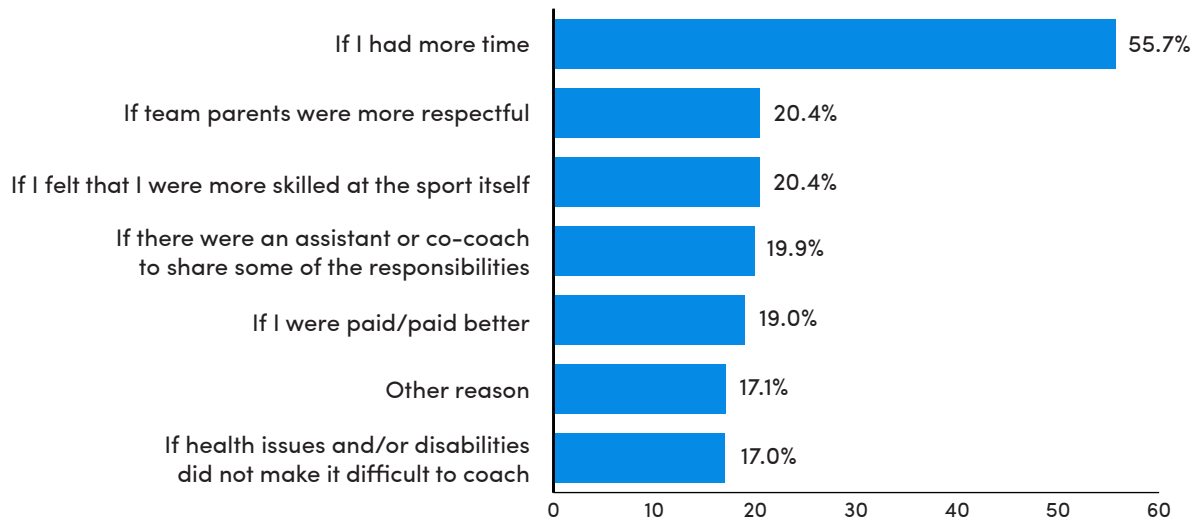


Photo courtesy of Madison Shockley

Figure 20: Factors That Would Make Former Coaches Who Are Not Very Likely or Not at all Likely to Coach in the Next 12 Months More Likely to Coach



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Youth Survey Findings

This section of the report includes information specific to each of the two regions of focus (Southeast Michigan and Western New York) as there may be readers interested in findings from one specific region. Where there is not large enough of a sample to report on survey findings by region separately, we included a subsection titled “Combined Data” that looks at aggregated data from both regions.

Demographics of Youth Survey Participants

A total of 398 youth completed the survey. About half of the participants were in each age category: 12–14 (49.6%) and 15–17 (50.4%). In terms of current grade at the time of the survey, the breakdown was as follows:

- 4.2% were in sixth grade or lower,
- 15.6% were in seventh grade,
- 14.9% were in eighth grade,
- 17.5% were in ninth grade,
- 20.5 % were in 10th grade,
- 14.7% were in 11th grade,
- 11.1% were in 12th grade, and
- 1.4% were in college or university, in school but ungraded or alternative system of grade, or not in school.

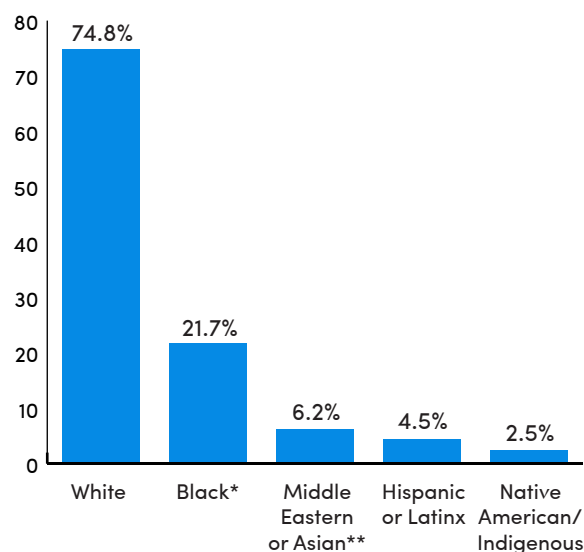
In terms of type of school, the breakdown was as follows:

- 75.7% attended a public school (not charter),
- 12.6 % attended a public charter school,
- 6.7% attended a private school,
- 4.1% were homeschooled, and
- 0.9% attended another type of school.

Nearly all participants (96.7%) identified as girl or female, and 2.4% identified as nonbinary.

Over two-thirds (67.8%) of participants identified as White, and 32.2% identified as a person of color (POC). Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided. Those who only selected White as their race are included in the White category. Participants who selected multiple races, including if they selected White as one race, are included in the POC category. Almost three-fourths (74.8%) selected White and over a fifth (21.7%) selected African American, Afro-Caribbean, or Black (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: Race/Ethnicity of Youth Participants



Note: Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided.

** Includes African American and Afro-Caribbean*

*** Includes Arab American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander*

The majority (94.5%) did not identify as a person living with a physical disability, 3.0% identified as a person living with a physical disability, and 2.5% were not sure.

Of the total 398 youth participating in the survey, over three-fifths (61.3%) were from the Southeast Michigan (SEMI) region and almost two-fifths (38.7%) were from the Western New York (WNY) region.

Among the 244 youth from the SEMI region:

- 36.9% lived in Wayne County,
- 26.1% in Oakland County,
- 18.1% in Macomb County,
- 8.5% in Washtenaw County,
- 4.1% in Livingston County,
- 3.2% in St. Claire County, and
- 3.1% in Monroe County.

More than half (52.1%) of youth lived in a suburb, 34.9% lived in a city, and much smaller segments lived in a rural area (7.5%) or a town (4.9%).

In terms of race/ethnicity of SEMI survey participants, over two-thirds (68.7%) of participants identified as White and one-fourth (25.0%) as African American, Afro-Caribbean, or Black (see Figure 22).

Among the 154 youth from the Western New York region:

- 61.8% lived in Erie County,
- 13.6% in Niagara County,
- 7.9% in Chautauqua County,
- 4.7% in Cattaraugus County,
- 3.7% in Genesee County,
- 3.0% in Allegany County,
- 2.7% in Orleans County, and
- 2.6% in Wyoming County.

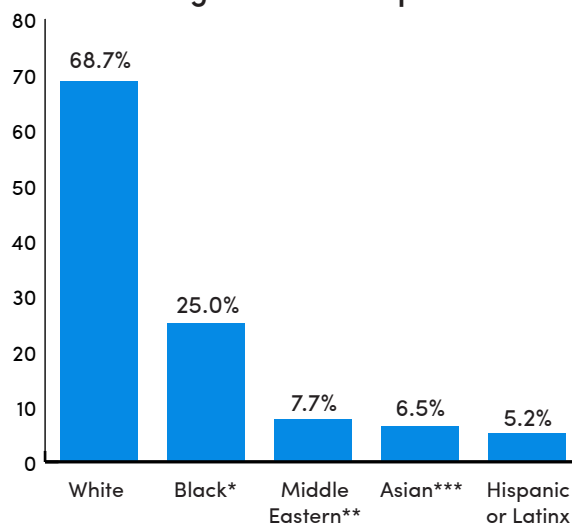
More than two-fifths (42.2%) of youth lived in a city, 29.9% lived in a suburb, 21.5% lived in a rural area, and 6.0% lived in a town.

In terms of race/ethnicity of WNY survey participants, over four-fifths (84.4%) of participants identified as White and over a seventh (16.5%) as African American, Afro-Caribbean, or Black (see Figure 23).

The survey also included a question about gender expression, which is defined as “the external presentation of an individual’s gender-related attributes” and “is distinct from gender identity, which refers to an individual’s internal sense of gender” (Gill & Frazer, 2016). Participants were asked to describe their appearance, style, and how they dress in terms of both feminine gender expression and masculine gender expression with a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all feminine/masculine) to 5 (very feminine/masculine) respectively.

Figure 24 (on following page) shows that masculine gender expression among survey participants is relatively low, with the majority (72.8%) selecting “not at all” or “slightly masculine.” Feminine gender expression is relatively high among survey participants, with seven-tenths (70.0%) selecting “mostly” or “very feminine.”

Figure 22: Race/Ethnicity of Southeast Michigan Youth Participants



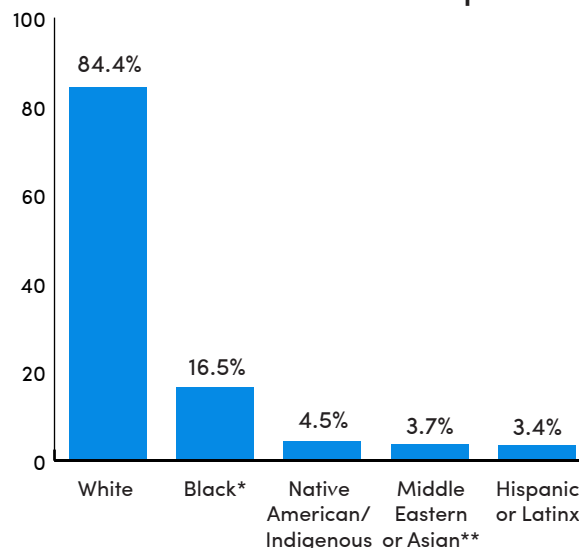
Note: Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided.

** Includes African American and Afro-Caribbean*

*** Includes Arab American*

**** Includes Asian American and Pacific Islander*

Figure 23: Race/Ethnicity of Western New York Youth Participants

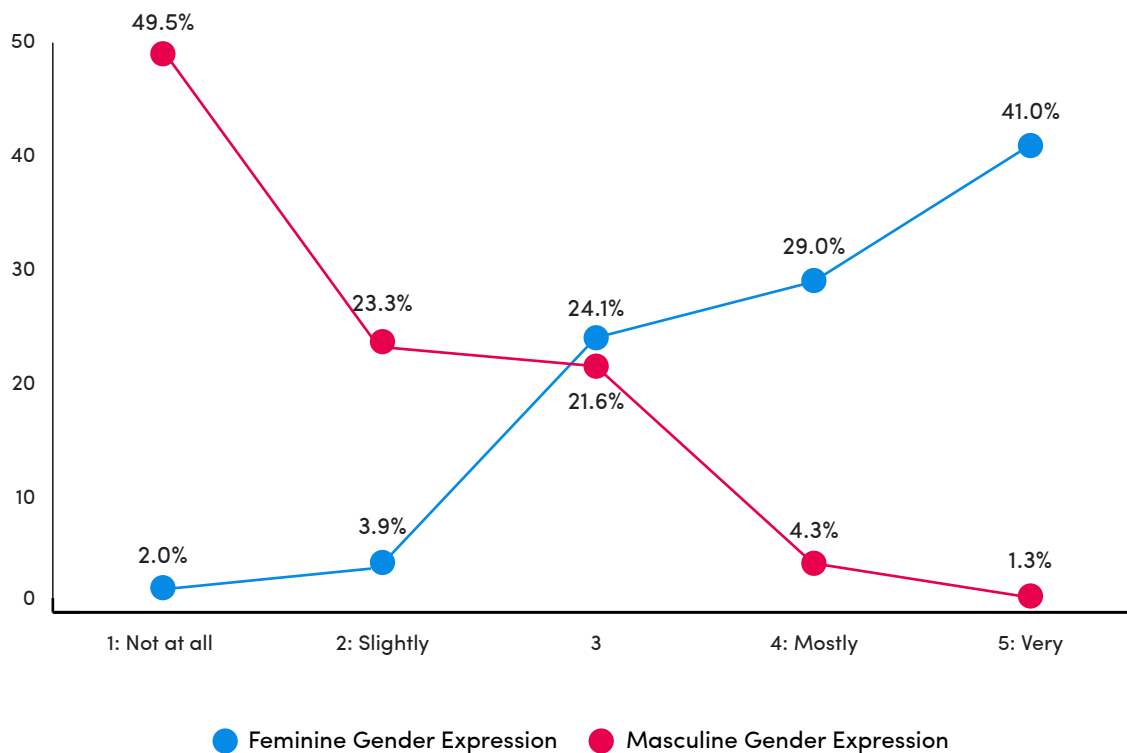


Note: Participants could select as many races/ethnicities as described them from the options provided.

** Includes African American and Afro-Caribbean*

*** Includes Arab American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander*

Figure 24. Gender Expression of Youth Survey Participants



Section 1: Participation and Engagement with Sports

This section includes information about youths' engagement in and experience with playing sports. This section explores the following research question:

Which psychosocial characteristics of girls (e.g., competitiveness and identity as an athlete) could be promoted, reinforced, or amplified to encourage participation and retention in sports? Does this vary by race (POC vs. not), age (12–14 vs. 15–17), or participation in sports (currently vs. not currently playing sports)?

Southeast Michigan

Among youth participants who reside in Southeast Michigan (SEMI), almost half (49.8%) indicated currently participating in organized sports ("current sports participants"), 17.0% reported having participated in organized sports in the past but did not participate currently ("former sports participants"), and a third (33.3%) had never participated in organized sports (see Figure 25 on following page).

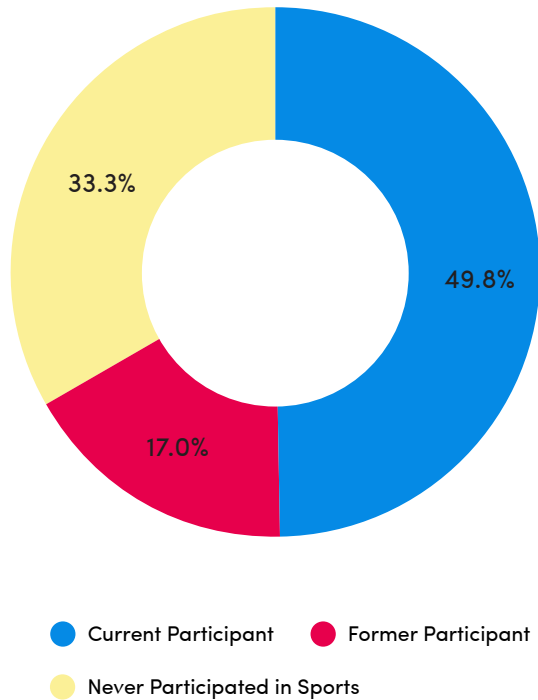
Participants were asked about sports that they have played or currently play and could select as many options as they wanted to. Among current and former sports participants, the most commonly played sport is softball/baseball (28.7%), followed by basketball (27.4%) and cheerleading (27.0%) (see Figure 26 on following page).



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Over two-thirds of current and former sports participants participated in the sport through their school (67.1%), over two-fifths (41.2%) participated in the community, and 4.1% participated in private or travel sports settings.

Figure 25: Sports Status of Youth Participants in Southeast Michigan



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

More than half (53.4%) had to compete or try out for the sport, whereas for 46.6% the sport was open to anyone.

Former sports participants were in the following grade ranges when they last played in one season or three consecutive months:

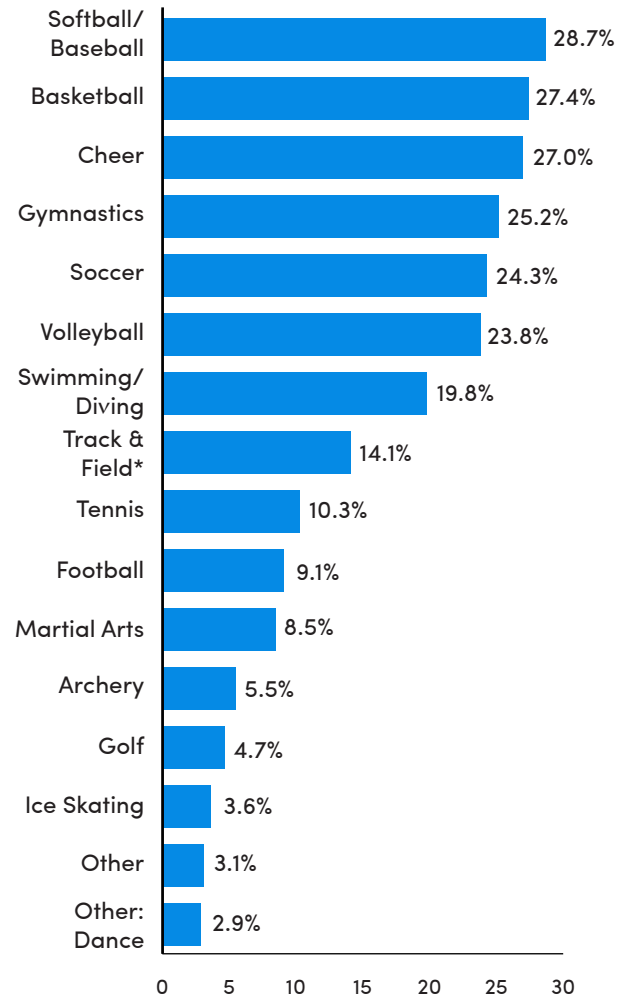
- 21.8% were in second to fifth grade,
- 31.8% were in sixth to seventh grade, and
- 46.4% were in eighth to 12th grade.

All participants were presented with eight statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Participants were presented with the following options for each statement: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Figures 27 and 28 (on following page) show the percentage of participants who either strongly agreed or agreed with each statement.

The first set of four statements focused on identity as an athlete:

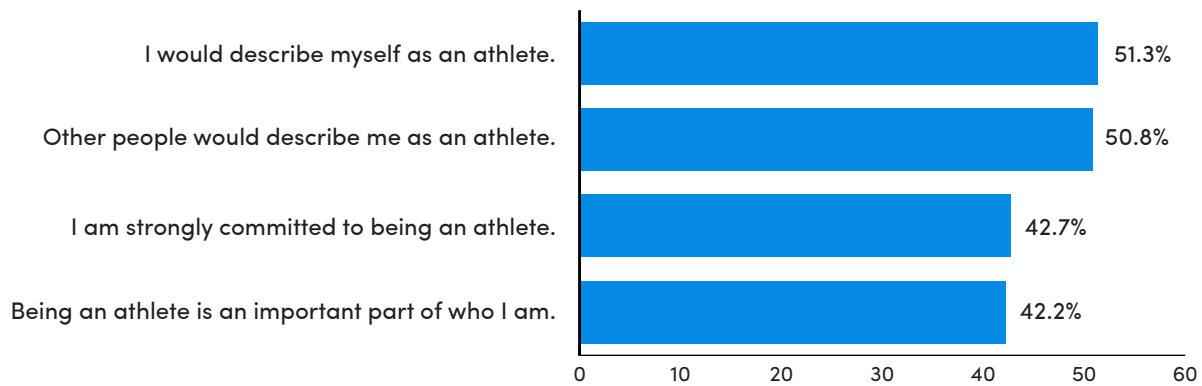
1. I would describe myself as an athlete.
2. Being an athlete is an important part of who I am.
3. Other people would describe me as an athlete.
4. I am strongly committed to being an athlete.

Figure 26: Sports That Southeast Michigan Youth Participants Have Participated in, Either Currently or Previously

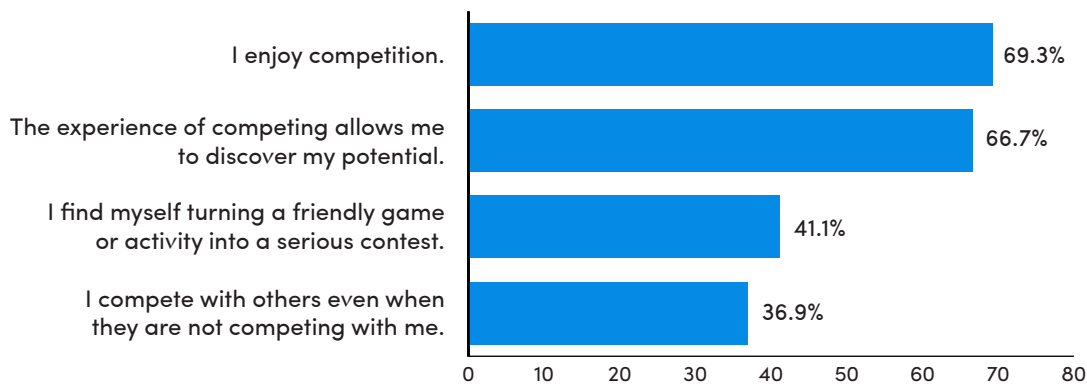


**Track & field includes cross country.*

**Figure 27: Agreement with Statements About Being an Athlete
Among Southeast Michigan Youth Participants**



**Figure 28: Agreement with Statements About Competition
Among Southeast Michigan Youth Participants**



Overall, more than half of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would describe themselves as an athlete (51.3%) and that other people would describe them as an athlete (50.8%).

The second set of four statements focused on competition:

1. I enjoy competition.
2. The experience of competing allows me to discover my potential.
3. I compete with others even when they are not competing with me.
4. I find myself turning a friendly game or activity into a serious contest.

About two-thirds of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy competition (69.3%) and that the experience of competing allows them to discover their potential (66.7%).

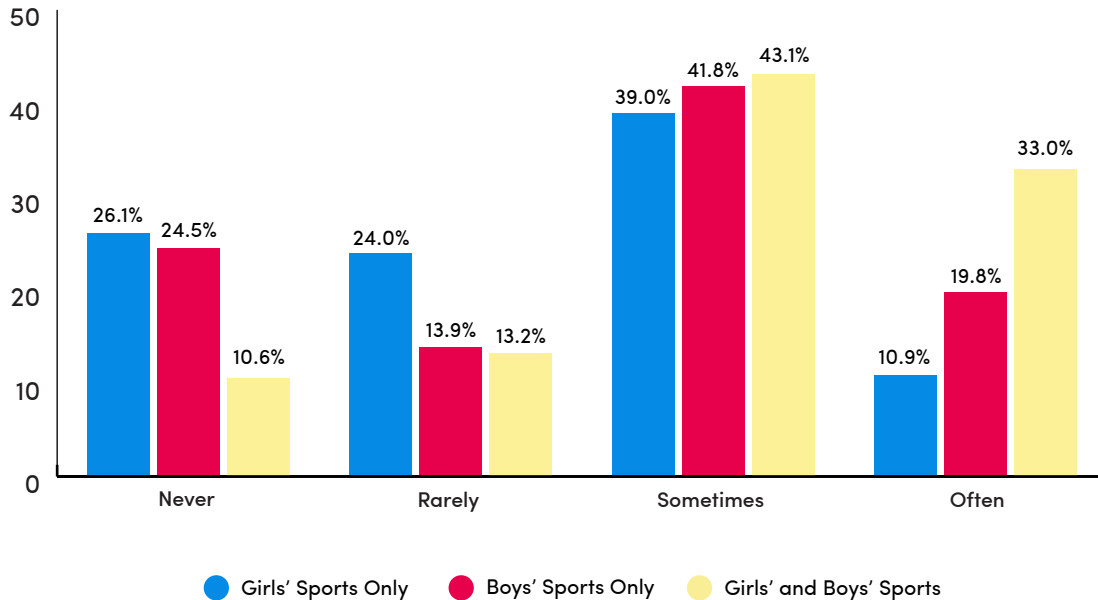
When asked about preference to play on teams that include boys, regardless of whether they have played an organized sport:

- 61.5% of participants indicated that it did not matter to them,
- 34.6% preferred to play on teams that do not include boys, and
- 3.9% preferred to play on teams that include boys.

Among current and former sports participants, over a third (38.0%) have played on teams that included boys as team members. Of the participants who have not played on teams that included boys:

- about half (51.3%) never practiced with boys,
- 27.8% rarely practiced with boys, and
- 20.9% sometimes, often, or always practiced with boys.

Figure 29: Frequency of Parades, Pep Rallies, or Other Community or School Celebrations Among Southeast Michigan Youth Participants



All participants, regardless of experience with playing organized sports, were asked how often parades, pep rallies, or other community or school celebrations have occurred in the past five years for only boys' sports, only girls' sports, and both boys' and girls' sports (see Figure 29).

- Over three-fifths (61.7%) said they have sometimes or often occurred for boys' sports only.
- About half (49.9%) said they have sometimes or often occurred for girls' sports only.
- Over three-fourths (76.2%) said they have sometimes or often occurred for both boys' and girls' sports.

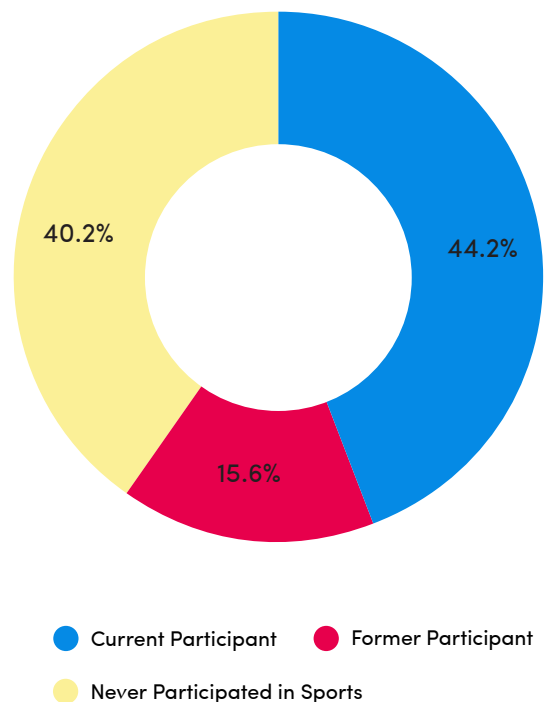
Western New York

Among youth participants who reside in WNY, over two-fifths (44.2%) currently participate in organized sports, 15.6% have participated in organized sports in the past but do not participate currently, and 40.2% have never participated in organized sports (see Figure 30).

Participants were asked about sports that they have played or currently play and could select as many options as they wanted to. Among current and former sports participants, the most commonly played sport was softball/baseball (38.5%), followed by soccer (37.0%) and cheerleading (34.3%) (see Figure 31 on following page).

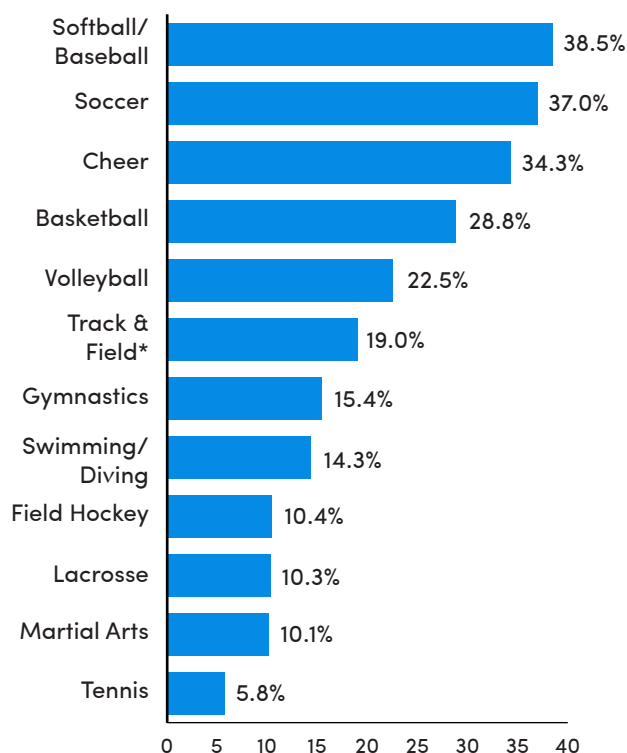
The majority of current and former sports participants participated in the sport through their school (85.3%) and nearly a fourth (23.9%) participated in the community.

Figure 30: Sports Status of Youth Participants in Western New York



Over three-fifths had to compete or try out for the sport (61.7%), whereas for nearly two-fifths of participants (38.3%) the sport was open to anyone.

Figure 31: Sports That Western New York Youth Participants Have Participated in, Either Currently or Previously



*Track & field includes cross country.

Former sports participants were in the following grade ranges when they last played in one season or three consecutive months:

- 36.9% were in second to fifth grade,
- 29.6% were in sixth or seventh grade, and
- 33.5% were in eighth to 12th grade.

All participants were presented with eight statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Participants were presented with the following options for each statement: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Figures 32 and 33 (on following page) show the percentage of participants who either strongly agreed or agreed with each statement.

The first set of four statements focused on identity as an athlete:

1. I would describe myself as an athlete.
2. Being an athlete is an important part of who I am.
3. Other people would describe me as an athlete.
4. I am strongly committed to being an athlete.

Over half (52.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would describe themselves as an athlete, and nearly half (49.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that other people would describe them as an athlete.

The second set of four statements focused on competition:

1. I enjoy competition.
2. The experience of competing allows me to discover my potential.
3. I compete with others even when they are not competing with me.
4. I find myself turning a friendly game or activity into a serious contest.

Nearly three-fourths (74.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy competition. Over two-thirds (68.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that the experience of competing allows them to discover their potential.

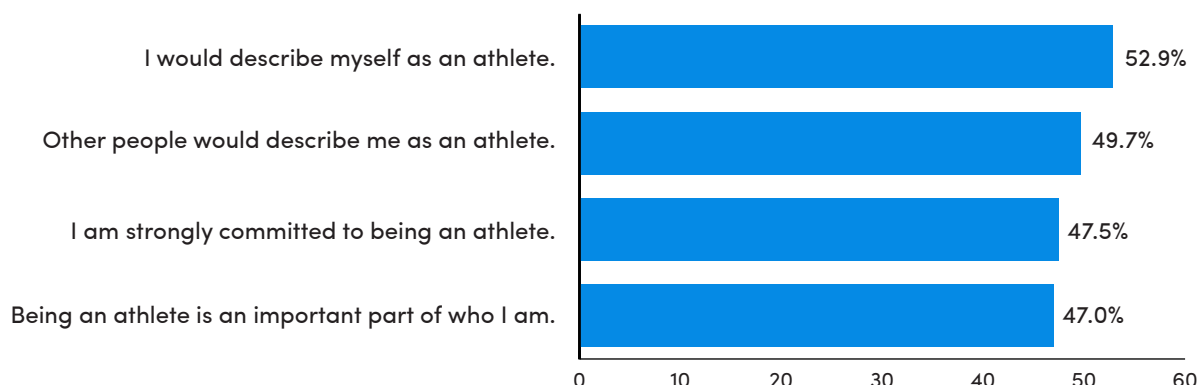
When asked about preference to play on teams that include boys, regardless of whether they have played an organized sport:

- 64.9% of participants indicated that it did not matter to them,
- 28.3% preferred to play on teams that do not include boys, and
- 6.9% preferred to play on teams that include boys.

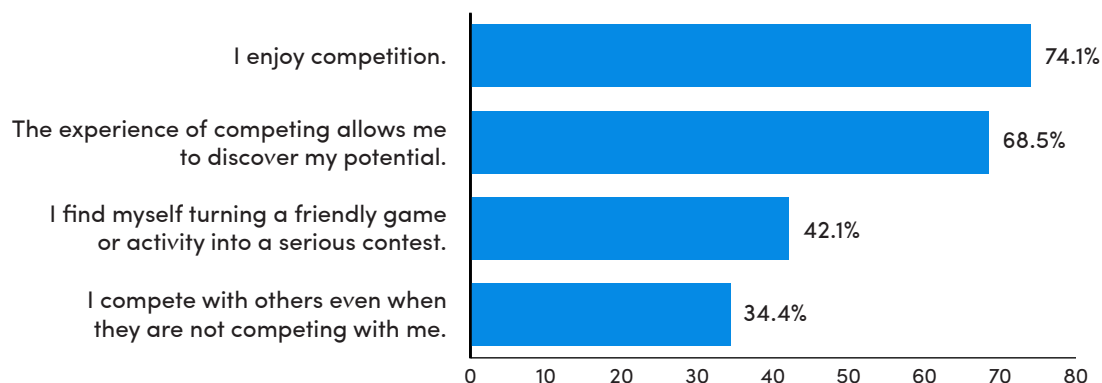


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**Figure 32: Agreement with Statements About Being an Athlete
Among Western New York Youth Participants**



**Figure 33: Agreement with Statements About Competition
Among Western New York Youth Participants**



Among current and former sports participants, about a third (33.8%) have played on teams that included boys as team members. Of the participants who have not played on teams that included boys:

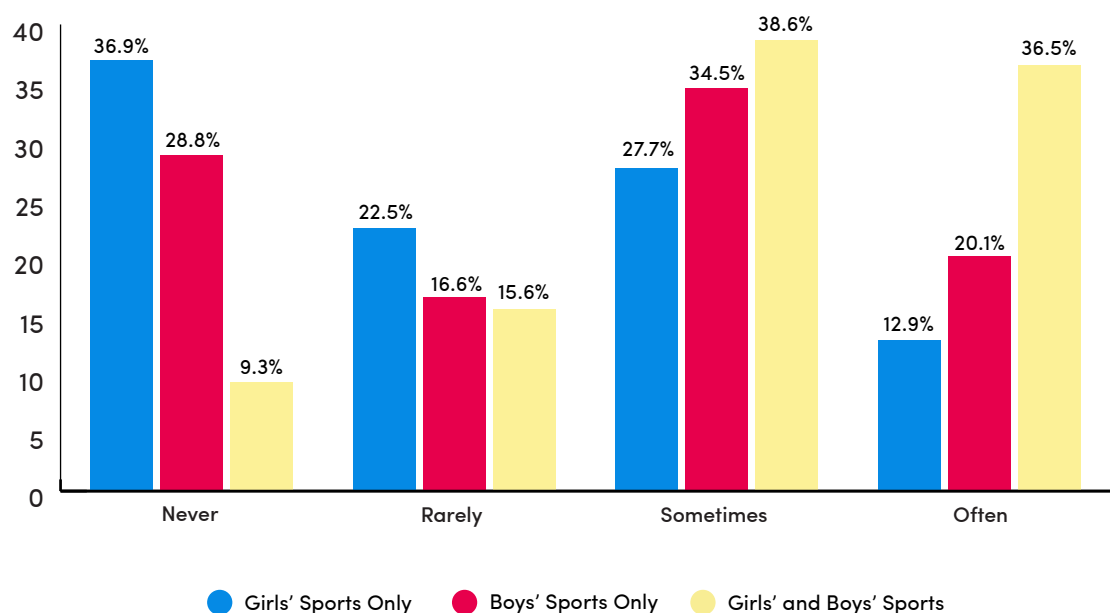
- over two-thirds (69.8%) never practiced with boys,
- 17.8% rarely practiced with boys, and
- 12.4% sometimes, often, or always practiced with boys.

All participants, regardless of experience with playing organized sports, were asked how often parades, pep rallies, or other

community or school celebrations have occurred in the past five years for only boys' sports, only girls' sports, and both boys' and girls' sports (see Figure 34 on following page).

- Over half (54.6%) said they have sometimes or often occurred for boys' sports only.
- About two-fifths (40.6%) said they have sometimes or often occurred for girls' sports only.
- About three-fourths (75.1%) said they have sometimes or often occurred for both boys' and girls' sports.

Figure 34: Frequency of Parades, Pep Rallies, or Other Community or School Celebrations Among Western New York Youth Participants



Combined Data

This section describes the findings for the SEMI and WNY combined samples.

Among former sports participants, the most commonly selected sport they recently played was soccer (16.5%), followed by basketball (13.3%), cheerleading (13.1%), softball/baseball (11.7%), volleyball (9.9%), and gymnastics (8.5%).

Among current sports participants, the most commonly played sport in the last year was softball/baseball (26.3%), followed by cheerleading (23.3%) and basketball (22.1%) (see Figure 35). Given that participants could select multiple sports, a question was included to ask which organized sport they consider their primary sport. The most commonly selected primary sport was cheerleading (14.3%), followed by basketball (14.2%) and softball/baseball (11.8%). Figure 35 shows the top eight sports played. While softball/baseball was the most commonly played sport, played by about one-fourth (26.3%) of participants, cheerleading was the most commonly selected primary sport (14.3%), followed by basketball (14.2%) and then softball/baseball (11.8%).

We examined differences in how survey participants answered the question about athlete-related statements by race, age, and sports status. Findings that are interesting, relevant, and statistically significant are reported below.

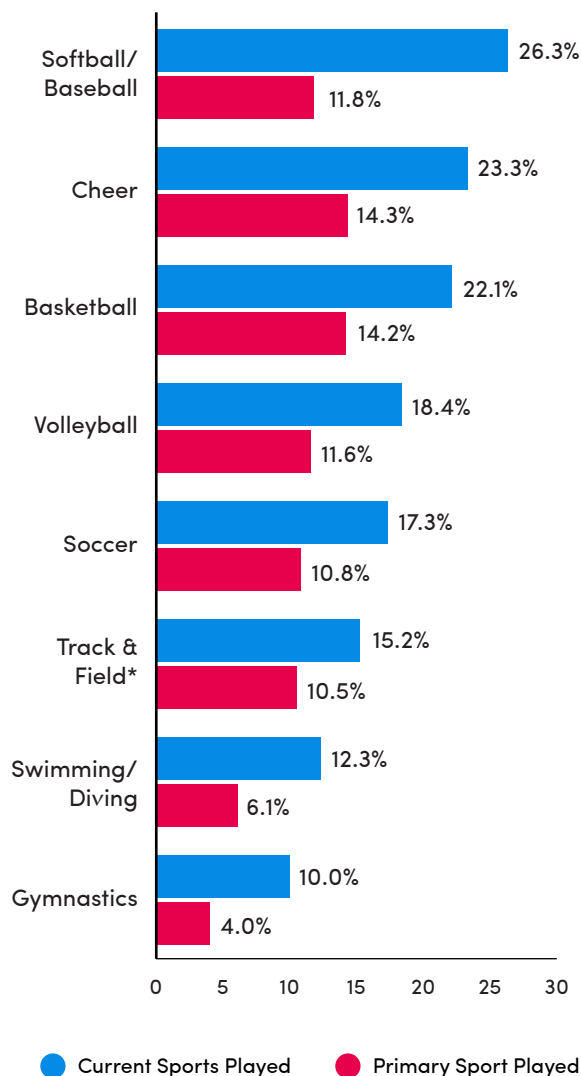
The following information in Figures 36 and 37 (on following page) shows the percentages of youth participants who currently play sports and those who are not currently playing sports who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. Additional information is included on odds ratios, which allow us to compare how much more likely current participants were to agree or strongly agree with statements than participants who either previously or never played sports.

Overall, about 70%–80% of current sports participants agreed or strongly agreed with statements about being an athlete whereas only about 20%–25% of participants not currently playing sports did the same (see Figure 36).

The next set of statements describe these differences in agreement further through odds ratios. Compared to those who are not currently playing organized sports (including both those who never played organized sports and former sports participants), youth who currently play organized sports are:

- about 13 times more likely to agree or strongly that they describe themselves as an athlete ($OR = 14.18, p < 0.001$)
- almost nine times more likely to agree or strongly agree that being an athlete is an important part of who they are ($OR = 9.93, p < 0.001$)
- about eight and a half times more likely to agree or strongly agree that other people would describe them as an athlete ($OR = 9.56, p < 0.001$)
- about eight times more likely to agree or strongly agree that they are strongly committed to being an athlete ($OR = 9.16, p < 0.001$)

Figure 35: Current and Primary Sport Played Among All Youth Participants



*Track & field includes cross country.

This information suggests that youths' sense of identity as an athlete is an important facilitator in engaging them in playing organized sports. It is important to note that there may also be a circular causality in that identifying as an athlete encourages girls to play sports and that by playing sports girls develop an identity as an athlete. Either way, reinforcing this identity or encouraging the development of identity as an athlete could encourage more youth to play organized sports.

In terms of statements about competition, a higher percentage of current sports participants than those not currently playing sports agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy competition

Figure 36: Agreement with Statements About Being an Athlete Among All Youth Participants

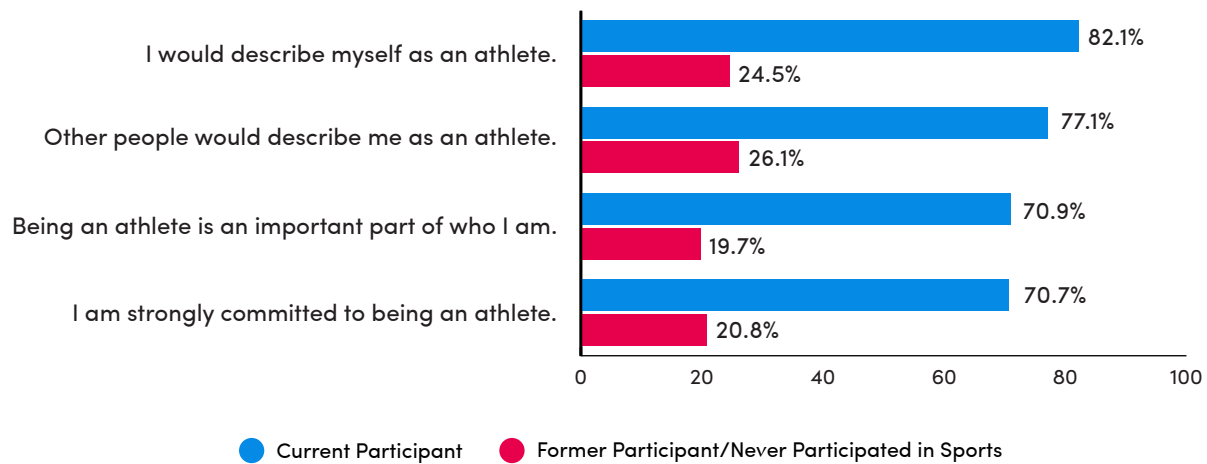
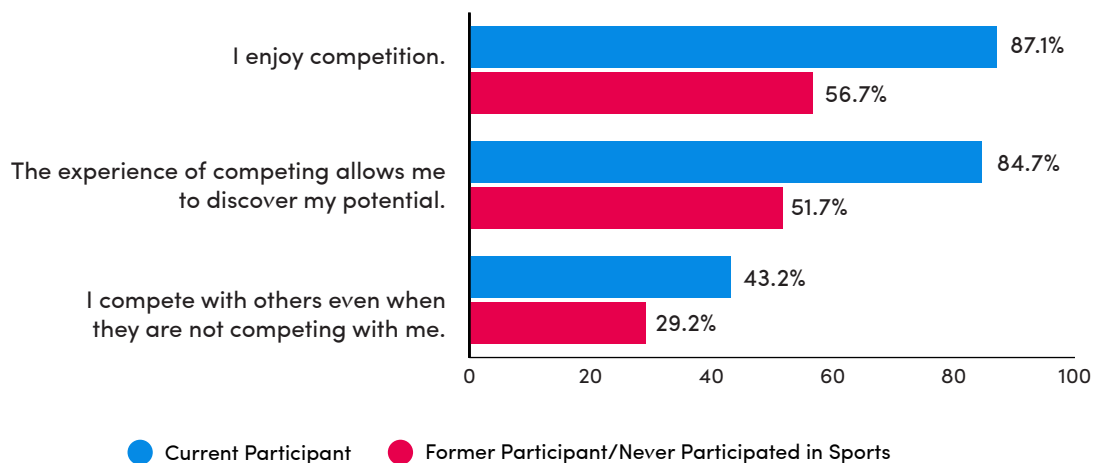


Figure 37: Agreement with Statements About Competition Among All Youth Participants



(87.1%), the experience of competing allows them to discover their potential (84.7%), and they compete with others even when others are not competing with them (43.2%; see Figure 37).

Furthermore, compared to former sports participants and those who never participated in sports, current youth sports participants are:

- about four times more likely to agree or strongly agree that competing allows them to discover their potential ($OR = 5.18$, $p < 0.001$)
- about four times more likely to agree or strongly agree that they enjoy competition ($OR = 5.16$, $p < 0.001$)

- about 80% more likely to agree or strongly agree that they compete with others even when others are not competing with them ($OR = 1.84$, $p = 0.004$)

Findings from the qualitative research indicate that girls have mixed attitudes towards competition. Some enjoyed having the opportunity to compete, while others disliked the pressure associated with it. This finding aligns with responses to the open-ended question in the survey about why youth survey participants did or did not play sports, with some currently engaged in organized sports describing their love for competition and some who have never engaged in organized sports describing how the competitive nature of sports prevents them from participating.

Section 2: Experiences and Barriers

This section explores the following research question:

How do girls’ experiences in general and gender-specific experiences (e.g., feeling that coaches understand specific needs of girls, experiences of teasing) associate with race (POC vs. not), age (12–14 vs. 15–17), or participation in sports (currently vs. not currently playing sports)?

Liking Sports

Current and former sports participants were presented with 15 statements and asked to respond about how often the situation described in each statement occurred.

Nine statements focused on positive experiences with playing sports:

- 1. There were places for us to change that felt safe and private.
- 2. There was enough time to rest during practice.
- 3. There was adequate time and supplies to stay hydrated/ drink water.
- 4. I felt that the coach(es) understood my specific needs as a girl.
- 5. I felt that coach(es) were supportive of me.
- 6. I saw that the coach(es) were supportive of the other girls.

- 7. I enjoyed seeing friends while practicing or playing sports.
- 8. I enjoyed competition while playing sports.
- 9. Playing sports helped me to manage stress.

Two statements focused on boys attending practice sessions or games:

- 1. Boys (not including coaches, assistants or boys practicing with the team) watched your team practice.
- 2. Boys attended games we played.

Four statements focused on negative experiences when playing sports:

- 1. Boys teased me.
- 2. I saw boys tease other girls on the team.
- 3. The team felt too competitive.
- 4. I didn’t have clothing or shoes that worked for me for practice or play.

Participants were presented with the following options for each statement: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always.

Southeast Michigan

Figure 38 shows the percentage of participants who selected “often” or “always” for each of the nine statements related to positive experiences when playing sports. Overall, the majority

Figure 38: Frequency of Positive Experiences During a Season of Playing Organized Sports Among Southeast Michigan Youth Participants



of participants indicated that these positive experiences often or always occurred. The top five statements for which the majority of participants selected “often” or “always” were:

- I enjoyed seeing friends while practicing or playing sports (85.7%).
- There were places for us to change that felt safe and private (84.8%).
- I saw that the coach(es) were supportive of the other girls (80.6%).
- There was adequate time and supplies to stay hydrated/ drink water (80.1%).
- I felt that coach(es) were supportive of me (78.2%).

In terms of the statements focused on boys attending practice or games:

- Over half (54.5%) indicated that boys often or always attended the games they played.
- Over one-fifth (22.5%) indicated that boys (not including coaches, assistants, or boys practicing with the team) often or always watched their team practice.

Figure 39 shows the percentage of participants who selected “often” or “always” for each of the four statements focused on negative experiences when playing sports.

Less than one-fifth of participants selected “often” or “always” for each statement, meaning that the majority of participants indicated that they experienced these situations sometimes, rarely, or never.



When asked whether they were uncomfortable with the uniforms that were required:

- 39.8% strongly disagreed,
- 33.4% disagreed,
- 10.8% neither agreed nor disagreed,
- 8.4% agreed, and
- 5.6% strongly agreed.

Figure 39: Frequency of Negative Experiences During a Season of Playing Organized Sports Among Southeast Michigan Youth Participants

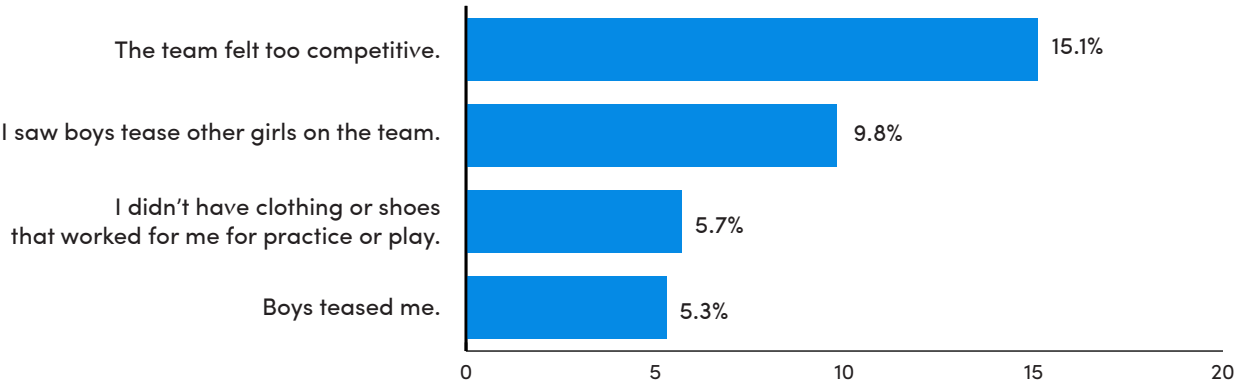


Figure 40 shows the percentage of participants who selected “often” or “always” for each of the nine statements related to positive experiences when playing sports. Overall, the majority of participants indicated that these positive experiences often or always occurred. The top five statements for which the majority of participants selected “often” or “always” were:

- I saw that the coach(es) were supportive of the other girls (90.6%).
- I felt that coach(es) were supportive of me (89.2%).
- There was adequate time and supplies to stay hydrated/ drink water (87.5%).
- There were places for us to change that felt safe and private (85.8%).
- I enjoyed seeing friends while practicing or playing sports (85.1%).

In terms of the statements focused on boys attending practice or games:

- Over half (57.0%) indicated that boys often or always attended the games they played.
- Nearly one-fifth (19.3%) indicated that boys (not including coaches, assistants, or boys practicing with the team) often or always watched their team practice.

Figure 41 (on following page) shows the percentage of participants who selected “often” or “always” for three of the four statements focused on negative experiences when playing sports. One statement is not included due to sample size considerations. Please see the [“Methodology”](#) section for more information about sample size considerations.

Less than one-seventh of participants selected “often” or “always” for each statement, meaning that the majority of participants indicated that they experienced these situations sometimes, rarely, or never.

When asked whether they were uncomfortable with the uniforms that were required:

- 42.9% strongly disagreed,
- 27.2% disagreed,
- 11.2% neither agreed nor disagreed,
- 9.6% agreed, and
- 9.1% strongly agreed.

Combined Data

Examining both regions together, some responses to the open-ended question in the survey about why survey participants play sports related to the positive experience of enjoying seeing friends while practicing or playing sports. Some survey participants, the majority of whom currently play

Figure 40: Frequency of Positive Experiences During a Season of Playing Organized Sports Among Western New York Youth Participants

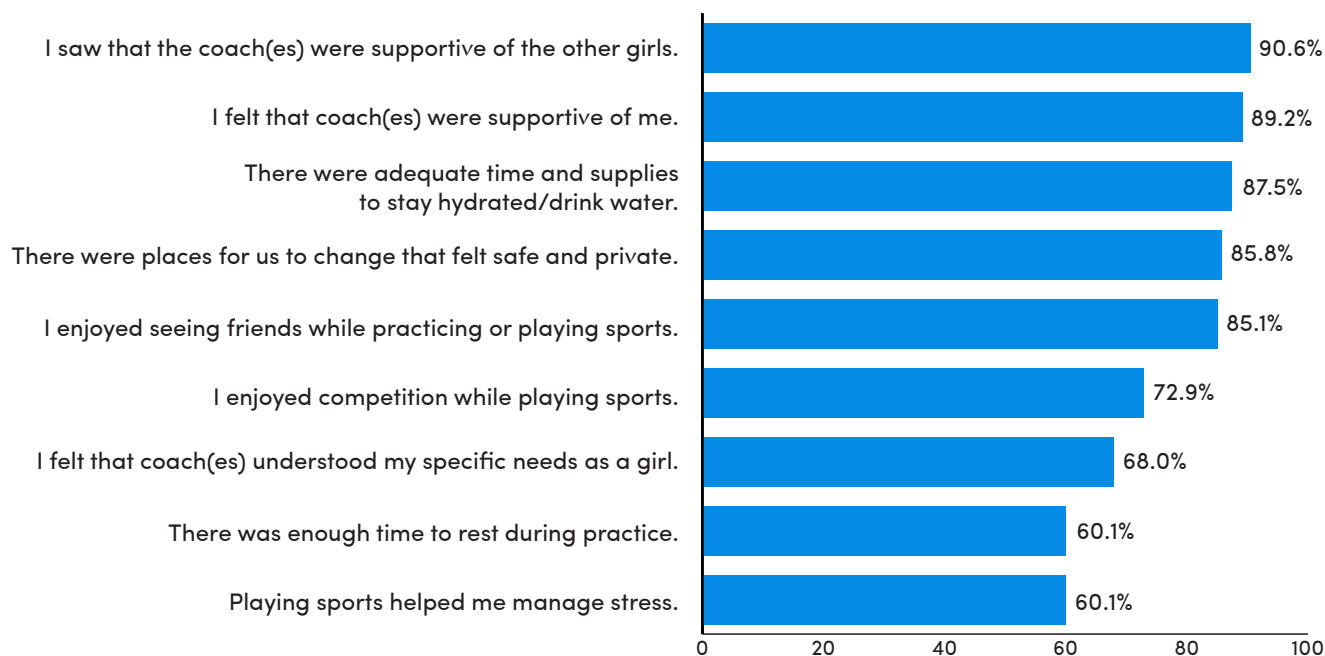
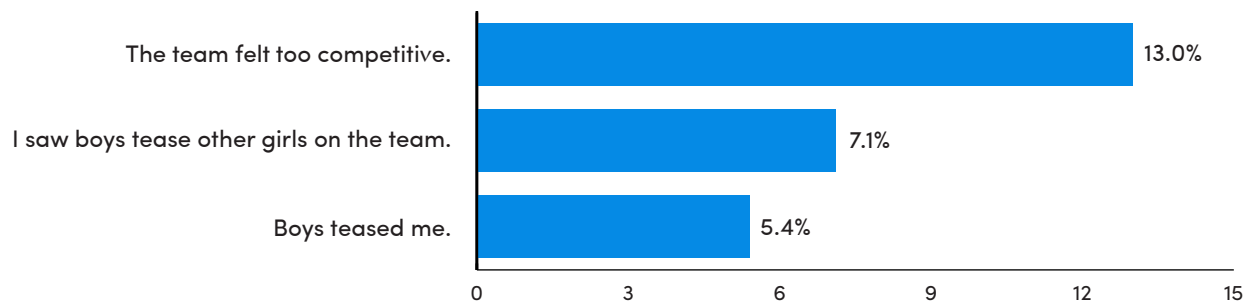


Figure 41: Frequency of Negative Experiences During a Season of Playing Organized Sports Among Western New York Youth Participants



organized sports, commented that they enjoy the opportunity to “hang out” and “bond” with friends. This information also aligns with qualitative research findings in which friendships that girls formed with their teammates was one of the most frequently mentioned “favorite” aspects of sports. Some survey participants shared that they found sports “fun” and “enjoyable.”

We examined differences in how survey participants answered the question about frequency of positive and negative experiences while playing sports by race, age, and sports status. Findings that are interesting, relevant, and statistically significant are reported below.

The following information in Figure 42 shows the percentages of participants ages 12–14 and ages 15–17 who indicated that they “often” or “always” had the experiences noted in the figure. A higher percentage of participants aged 12–14 compared to participants aged 15–17 “often” or “always” saw that the coach(es) were supportive of other girls (89.4% vs. 78.9%) and felt that coach(es) were supportive of them (88.1% vs. 76.2%).

In fact, compared to participants who are 15–17 years old, those aged 12–14 years old were about one and quarter times more likely to have “often” or “always” felt that coach(es) were supportive of them ($OR = 2.30$, $p = 0.014$) and seen that coach(es) were supportive of other girls ($OR = 2.26$, $p = 0.021$).

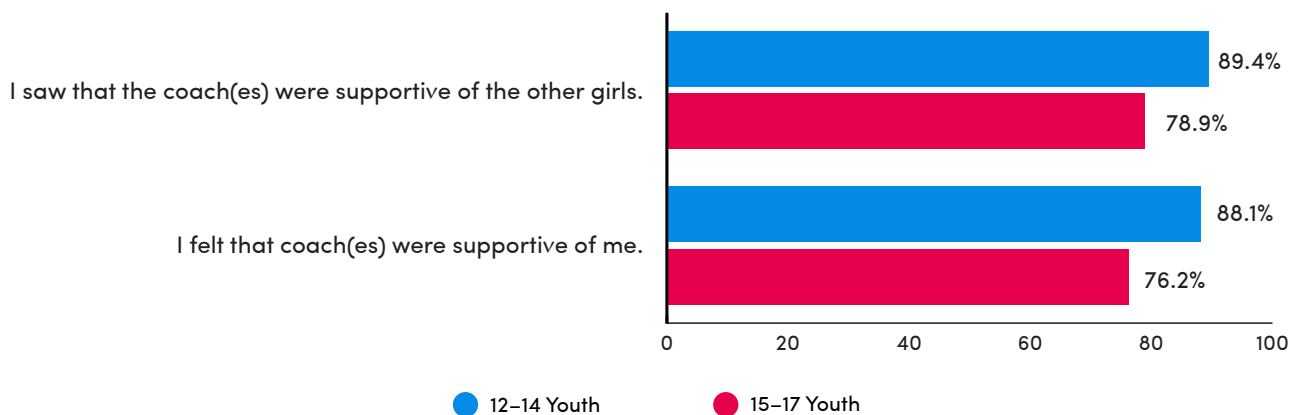
This information suggests girls aged 12–14 in sports perceive that they have more support from coaches compared to girls aged 15–17. Perhaps coaches would benefit from training or learning more about how to better support girls aged 15–17 in sports.

Barriers to Sports

This section includes results of aggregated data across both regions due to sample size considerations. Please see the [“Methodology”](#) section for more information about sample size considerations.

Former sports participants were presented with a list of reasons that might be why they stopped playing sports. These reasons were identified based on findings from focus groups in the

Figure 42: Frequency of Perceived Coach Support During a Season of Playing Organized Sports Among All Youth Participants by Age



qualitative research phase of this study. They were then asked to select as many options as they considered important. The most commonly selected response was having too much schoolwork (28.5%), followed by wanting to do something else (i.e., different activity, homework, or time with friends) more than wanting to do the sport (26.7%) and not being able to attend practice regularly (20.4%) (see Figure 43).

Since participants could select as many reasons as applicable, the survey included a follow-up question asking participants to indicate the one reason of the reasons they selected that was the most important reason for why they stopped playing sports. The most commonly selected response was wanting to do something else more than wanting to do the sport (17.0%), followed by having too much schoolwork (13.0%), the sport being too expensive (10.7%), not having fun (8.3%), and the sport requiring too much time (6.5%).

Section 3: Behavioral Intentions

This section explores the following research question:

What is the role of encouragement from influential adults and parents/guardians in influencing girls’ participation in sports?

Southeast Michigan

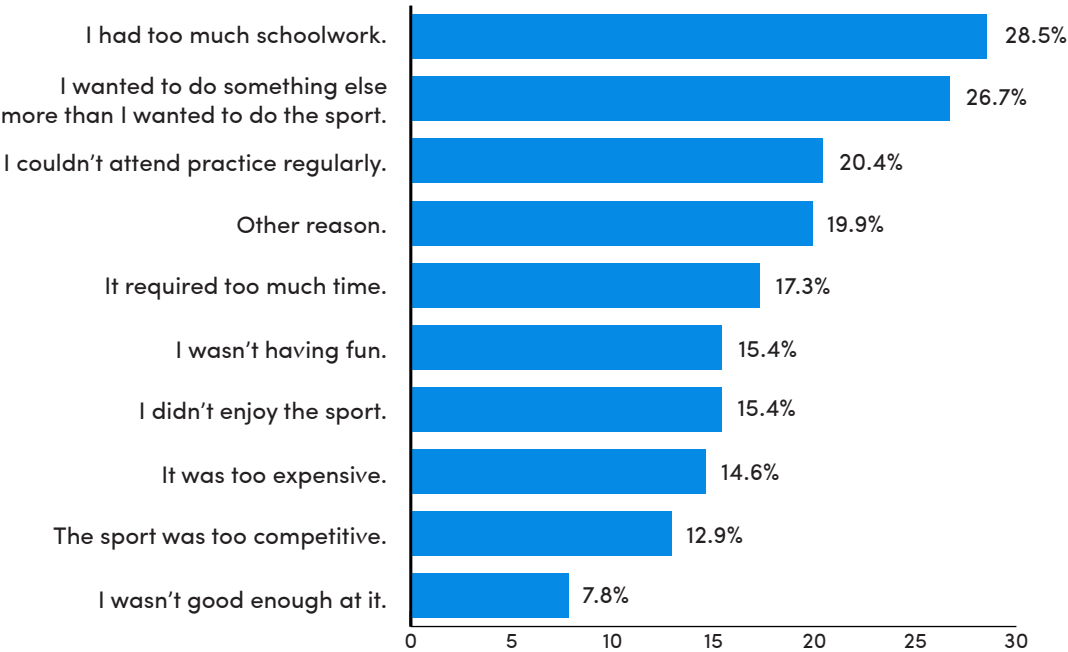
Among former sports participants or those who have never participated in sports, the following indicates the breakdown of responses in terms of likeliness to play a complete season or



three months consecutively of any sport sometime in the next 12 months:

- 16.3% said “very likely,”
- 26.6% said “likely,”
- 23.1% said “unlikely,” and
- 33.9% said “very unlikely.”

Figure 43: Reasons Why Participants Stopped Playing Organized Sports



Over a third (37.1%) of all participants indicated that there are sports that they would like to participate in but cannot participate in for some reason. These participants were then asked to select a maximum of three options from the presented list of sports that they would like to participate in. The most commonly selected responses were cheerleading (15.8%), followed by gymnastics (14.5%) and basketball (14.2%) (see Figure 44 on following page).

The survey also included a question about whether participants had an adult in their life, such as an adult friend, relative, or mentor, who is not their parent but has had a significant influence on them and whom they feel they can count on in times of need. The responses were as follows:

- 51.7% said they had more than one person,
- 30.8% said they had one person, and
- 17.5% said they had no person like this.

Participants who said they have someone like this in their life were asked to think of the most important adult other than a parent who has a significant influence on them and whether that person encourages them to play sports. The responses were as follows:

- 31.9% said “very much,”
- 32.5% said “somewhat,”
- 15.8% said “a little bit,” and
- 19.8% said “not at all.”

All participants were asked if their parent(s) or guardian(s) encourages them to play sports. The responses were as follows:

- 47.8% said “very much,”
- 26.2% said “somewhat,”
- 14.3% said “a little bit,” and
- 11.7% said “not at all.”

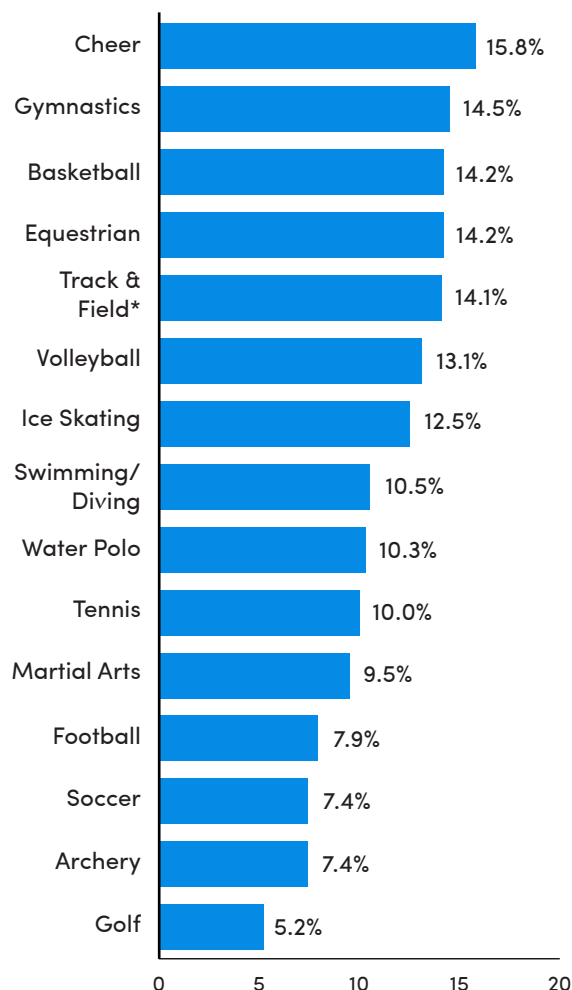
Western New York

Among former sports participants or those who have never participated in sports, the following indicates the breakdown of responses in terms of likeliness to play a complete season or three months consecutively of any sport sometime in the next 12 months:

- 12.2% said “very likely,”
- 29.6% said “likely,”
- 33.6% said “unlikely,” and
- 24.6% said “very unlikely.”

About a third (33.8%) of all participants indicated that there are sports that they would like to participate in but cannot participate in for some reason. These participants were then asked to select a maximum of three options from the presented list of sports that they would like to participate in. The most

Figure 44: Sports That Southeast Michigan Youth Participants Would Like to Participate in but Cannot for Some Reason



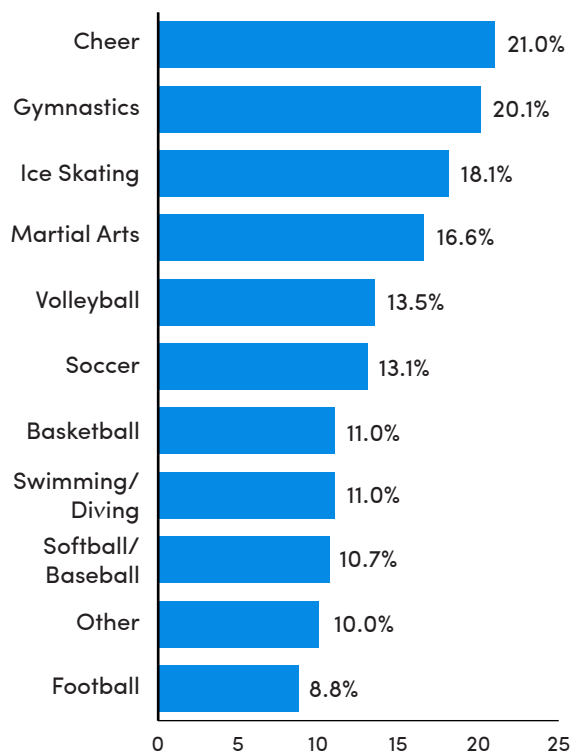
*Track & field includes cross country.

commonly selected responses were cheerleading (21.0%), followed by gymnastics (20.1%) and ice skating (18.1%) (see Figure 45 on following page).

The survey also included a question about whether participants had an adult in their life, such as an adult friend, relative, or mentor, who is not their parent but has had a significant influence on them and whom they feel they can count on in times of need. The responses were as follows:

- 48.6% said they had more than one person,
- 38.7% said they had one person, and
- 12.7% said they had no person like this.

Figure 45: Sports That Western New York Youth Participants Would Like to Participate in but Cannot for Some Reason



Participants who said they have someone like this in their life were asked to think of the most important adult other than a parent who has a significant influence on them and whether that person encourages them to play sports. The responses were as follows:

- 41.7% said “very much,”
- 23.9% said “somewhat,”
- 20.1% said “a little bit,” and
- 14.3% said “not at all.”



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All participants were asked if their parent(s) or guardian(s) encourages them to play sports. The responses were as follows:

- 44.9% said “very much,”
- 26.6% said “somewhat,”
- 14.6% said “a little bit,” and
- 13.9% said “not at all.”

Combined Data

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the responses to questions about influential adults by sports status.

We examined differences in how survey participants answered this question by race, age, and sports status. Findings that are interesting, relevant, and statistically significant are reported.

Figure 46 (on following page) shows the percentages of those who have ever played organized sports (either in the past or currently) and those who never played organized sports

Table 2. Responses to Questions About Influential Adults by Sports Status

		Current Sports Participant	Former Sports Participant	Never Participated in Sports
Influential non-parent adult	At least one person	87.0%	74.0%	85.5%
	No person like this	13.0%	26.0%	14.5%
Non-parent adult encouragement to play sports	Somewhat or very much	86.1%	64.4%	36.3%
	Not at all or a little bit	13.9%	35.6%	63.7%
Parent(s) or guardian(s) encouragement to play sports	Somewhat or very much	90.8%	84.9%	44.1%
	Not at all or a little bit	9.2%	15.1%	55.9%

who indicated that adults in their life somewhat or very much encourage them to play sports. Additional information is included on odds ratios, which allow us to compare how much more likely those who ever played sports were to indicate that an adult in their life somewhat or very much encourages them to play a sport than those who have never played an organized sport.

Overall, about 80%–90% of current and former sports participants indicated that a parent/guardian and/or an influential non-parent adult somewhat or very much encourages them to play sports whereas only about 35%–45% of those who have never played organized sports indicated the same.

Additionally, compared to those who have never played organized sports, current and former sports participants were:

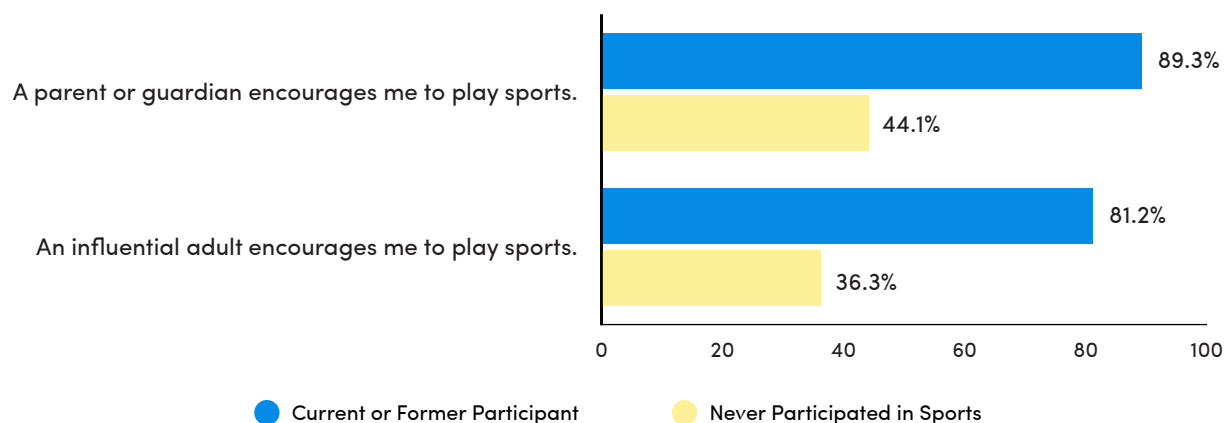
- about six and half times more likely to indicate that a non-parent adult somewhat or very much encourages them to play sports ($OR = 7.57, p < 0.001$).
- about nine and a half times more likely to indicate that their parent or guardian somewhat or very much encourages them to play sports ($OR = 10.58, p < 0.001$).

These findings suggest that adults, both non-parent adults and parents/guardians, play an important role in encouraging youth to participate in organized sports. Therefore, efforts to include these adults in the process of reaching out to youth to encourage them to participate in sports could be helpful.

These findings also align with information ascertained through the literature review phase. Girls whose parents support them are more likely to stay engaged in sports and physical activity. Support includes transportation, attendance at events, buying equipment, providing food, attending sports events together, and supporting costs associated with sports participation throughout the year (Zarrett et al., 2020).



Figure 46: Agreement of Somewhat or Very Much of Adult Encouragement to Play Sports



Recommendations

Sample Recommendations from the Survey Research

This section provides sample recommendations suggested by the findings from the coach and youth surveys, generated by the local leaders in Western New York and Southeast Michigan, led by Dr. Renee Cadzow. The recommendations below are a starting point and not an exhaustive list as this process is ongoing.

For Women Coaches

Offer more training, including training on gender-sensitive coaching and coaching girls.

Training seems to be an important facilitator for coaches, especially given that among survey participants, current coaches have more recent training and more hours of training than former coaches. Additionally, responses to a question about the reasons why interested coaches and former coaches are not likely to coach in the next 12 months suggest that offering training can help bolster confidence in coaching skills. Relatedly, offering more training could help interested coaches in developing an identity as or seeing themselves as a coach.

Recommendations from the qualitative research suggest that building a pipeline of coaches who are familiar with gender-sensitive approaches to coaching would help with supporting girls in sports. Findings from the literature review suggest that the retention of girls in sports is impacted by coaches and their level of training and education. The survey findings further support this information and provide additional insight into what type of training those who coach and those who are interested in coaching would find beneficial. Responses to open-ended questions in the survey suggest that coaches would like more training, resources, and education related to gender-sensitive topics, such as mental health, body issues, and disordered eating, and menstrual cycles. Furthermore, opportunities to offer mentorship through training or chances for interested coaches to shadow current coaches could be beneficial as a way of building relationships and social support among coaches.

Consider ways in which coaches can support girls of different ages in a more developmentally aligned way.

Related to the recommendation about offering more training for coaches, youths' perceptions of how supportive coaches are can influence their engagement and retention in sports. Survey findings suggest that youth ages 12 to 14 years old are more likely to report feeling that coaches are supportive of them and other girls compared to youth ages 15 to 17 years old. This

finding is important to consider given that many girls drop out of sports in middle school. Therefore, in addition to gender-sensitive coaching training, perhaps offering age-specific coaching training for coaches could be helpful.

Emphasize community-related benefits of coaching, especially to engage coaches of color.

Survey findings suggest that those who have experience in coaching, either currently or in the past, agree that coaching is an opportunity to support young people, especially in terms of mentoring and seeing them grow.

Especially for coaches of color, coaching can be an avenue for building social connection within their community. Emphasizing the benefits of coaching related to social connection may encourage more coaches of color to coach. Additionally, emphasizing how coaching can help with building self-confidence may encourage more coaches of color to coach. These reasons may be important to highlight in efforts to recruit more female coaches, especially more female coaches of color.

Address perceptions of experiences of female coaches.

Survey participants interested in coaching perceive that women coaches have a harder time than men coaches do. Addressing this perception may be helpful in encouraging more women to coach. Facilitating opportunities for interested women coaches to hear from current women coaches about their experiences may help with addressing this perception. Additionally, considering ways in which coaches may be able to connect with each other in an ongoing manner may help with creating a channel in which coaches can share their experiences with others who might have been in similar situations.

Offer strategies for navigating relationships with parents of athletes.

The most common events that occurred sometimes or often while coaching for both current coaches and former coaches included negative interactions with parents (i.e., parents giving too much direction and coaches feeling uncomfortable with how the parents interacted with them or the players). Providing coaches with information about conflict resolution as well as how to navigate and manage dynamics with parents could potentially support coaches in addressing such negative experiences that may dissuade them from coaching. Additionally, sharing information with parents about how to work with coaches could help in setting standards around parents' interactions with coaches.

For Girls in Sports

Offer opportunities to reflect on identity as an athlete and help girls see themselves as athletes.

Identifying as an athlete seems to be an important facilitator for those currently engaged in sports. Helping girls see themselves as athletes could encourage more of them to play sports.

Involve adults with influence (both non-parent and parent/guardian) in encouraging and supporting girls to play sports.

Survey findings confirmed what existing literature states: Girls who have supportive parents stay in sports longer than those who do not. Therefore, leveraging parental support could support the engagement of more girls in sports. Given that interactions with parents can potentially create negative experiences for coaches, perhaps encouraging parents to consider ways to support their children in sports without undermining coaches' skills or leadership could be helpful as well.

Additionally, reaching out to non-parent adults and parents/guardians to share benefits of playing sports could in turn influence them to encourage girls to play sports. This approach takes into consideration the interpersonal relationships that youth may have and how those relationships could be leveraged to support their engagement in sports.

These conclusions offer a variety of ways to support girls in sports and women in coaching that are grounded in the survey findings. Incorporating community engagement on interpretation of survey findings and conclusions can aid in identifying actionable, practical next steps to support the participation and retention of girls in sports and women in coaching.



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Recommendations from the Literature to Increase Women in Coaching

Project Play's *Coaching Trends* report highlights the need for coaches to address the mental health of players, foster a positive environment and connect on a personal level with their athletes (Aspen Institute, 2022a). As Jowett and colleagues state in reference to the sports industry, "whereby its masculine, hegemonic, authoritative nature has started to give way to empathy, compassion, understanding, partnership and connection. ... The reality is that masculinity (leadership and agency) and femininity (relationship and connection) can co-exist for the betterment of sport" (Jowett et al., 2022, p. 20). To increase representation of women in coaching, two groups of researchers have provided suggestions:

For the coaching of youth sports, particularly among women parents (LaVoi & Leberman, 2015):

- Ask and invite women to coach.
- Involve and invite girls into coaching early.
- Include mentorship/buddy system.
- Include co-coaching option (shared responsibility).
- Provide women-only coaching clinics and training sessions.
- Indicate the possibility of better relationship with child(ren).
- Increase awareness about the personal benefits (exercise, outside time, time with your child(ren)).
- Make apparent the transferability of typical skills of mothers to that of coaching.
- Emphasize the impact of being a role model.

To increase representation in collegiate and professional sports (Jowett et al., 2022; LaVoi et al., 2019) :

- Set recruitment targets:
 - Hire women in positions previously occupied by men.
 - Hire a female head coach when an institution adds a new sport.
 - Replace an outgoing female coach with another woman.
- Implement policies and strategies for pregnancy, parental leave, equal pay, flexible working arrangement contracts (e.g., job share, part-time, flexible work hours), childcare, and time away.
- Implement recruitment processes that emphasize the value of diversity and inclusion and encourages female coaches to apply.
- Identify and lift up female role models.
- Create supportive female coaching interest groups and networks.

Recommendations from the Literature to Increase Participation of Girls in Sports and Physical Activity

- Facilitate parent and friend support
 - The frequency of moderate to vigorous physical activity among girls aged 10–14 (inclusive of girls identifying as African American, Latinx and White) is strongly correlated with the presence of friend support. Friend support was measured by also being physically active and helping with transportation to physical activity opportunities. Friends' support is also related to organized sports participation for African American girls. Parental support (transportation and attitudinal) was related to more participation in organized sports in all groups (Duncan et al., 2015).
- Structure programs around family involvement
 - Programs that effectively engage African American girls in physical activity focus on family involvement. This includes not only factoring in work schedules and transportation but also engaging family members in physical activity behavior change through weekly meetings or joint activities (Barr Anderson & Kraemer, 2018).
- Strive for racial congruity between participants and instructors as well as materials and cultural representation related to religion, food, and other cultural aspects
 - Cultural tailoring of activities, including culturally congruent instructors and intervention materials, integration of faith-based components (e.g., Gospel aerobics) and integration of cultural foods also contributed to more effective programming for physical activity and wellness among African American girls and their families (Barr Anderson & Kraemer, 2018).
 - Research conducted on Muslim girls in the UK reveals the ways in which they actively navigate physical activity opportunities in school and community. Considerations like family expectations, religion, and modesty influence activities (e.g., swimming is influenced by whether they have a full-coverage suit or access to an all-woman swimming area) (Stride & Flintoff, 2017).
- Replace hard spaces with green spaces in neighborhoods
 - A Los Angeles elementary school replaced hard, asphalt physical activity areas with grass. Subsequently, boys and girls engaged in more physical activity. At four months after the greening of the space, girls remained involved in more vigorous activities for longer time periods (Raney et al., 2019).
- Implement girl-centered programs
 - Girls-only programs or those that center girls and include programming related to self-esteem, confidence, and peer support (like Girls on the Run) increase self-esteem among girls in grades 3–8. The impact lasts beyond participation in the program (Weiss et al., 2019; Iachini et al., 2017).
- Girl-centered programs like Girls on the Move are successful at increasing physical activity when girls report enjoying it and feeling socially supported (Robbins et al., 2019).
- Focus group results from both rural and urban girls in WNY suggest that girls-only programming allows them to avoid the teasing or bullying sometimes perpetuated by boys in co-ed environments.
- Advocate for additional government support and policy change
 - Regional and national governments in countries like Ireland, Canada, and Australia are funding and/or subsidizing education and training programs aimed at increasing women in sports (Elliott, 2020).
 - Norway, which has one of the highest rates of women's participation in sports, approaches the issue through addressing socioeconomic gender disparities. Their perspective is that societal-level change will influence change within sports. Additionally, sports are less competitive for youth participants before the age of 11, making it enjoyable for more youth to play without added pressures of rankings and scores (Elliott, 2020).
 - National promotional campaigns like Sport England's This Girl Can campaign, launched in 2015, seek to engage all girls and women inclusive of shape, size, and ability, into physical activity and sports (Sport England, n.d.).
 - Similarly, Australia's Department of Health launched a Girls Make Your Move campaign to promote women in sports and provide information on how to get involved in physical activity (ORIMA Research, 2022).
 - Ireland, Scotland, France, and Australia are working towards equity in sports media coverage for women in sports (Elliott, 2020).

Recommendations from State of Play in WNY

(Note – these recommendations summarized from the State of Play WNY report (Aspen Institute, 2017b).)

Ask Kids What They Want

- Provide opportunities and safe spaces to youth to try more sports.
- Design and choose activities to ensure inclusion of all students; this may mean choosing sports that are familiar to new Americans, offsetting the cost of sports through scholarships, or ensuring adaptive sports to include youth with disabilities.



- Involve youth in the planning and implementation of youth sports programs.
- Monitor youth participation in sports through the use of Youth Risk Behavior Surveys. Expand monitoring beyond middle and high school to elementary school-aged children.
- Ensure outreach and engagement efforts are accessible to multi-lingual families.

Reintroduce Free Play

- Find ways to reach the region's rural children and teens, like loosely structured mentored physical activity in mobile home parks.
- Provide school-based fitness programs with loosely structured activities and new equipment like climbing walls.
- Pass and enforce state mandates for free play periods, which would stimulate school scheduling and infrastructure changes to ensure adequate indoor and outdoor space, weather permitting.
- Remove financial and transportation barriers that restrict youth access to area parks through programs like state reimbursement for transportation expenses state-owned parks.
- Expand access to schools to function as community centers outside of school hours affording community access to gyms and fields for out-of-school and weekend play.

Encourage Sport Sampling

- Increase the supply of diverse sports activities to meet the youth demands, particularly in urban settings.
- Introduce sports that are different than what has been typically offered in the region, like lacrosse, squash, tennis, and skating.
- Revitalize the Empire State Summer Games, which disbanded in 2014 due to financial difficulty. This was an excellent resource for exposure to fencing, rowing, shooting, lacrosse and many other sports.
- Engage community assets as role models, such as an abundance of Olympians and Paralympians in the region who are active in the community.
- Follow best practices, such as pairing new sports with a popular/high-demand one (e.g., hang volleyball nets for kids showing up for basketball).

Revitalize In-Town Leagues

- Use the data to inform sports in which to offer local recreational leagues. According to a household survey, across the WNY region, the best opportunities are basketball, baseball, swimming, running, and soccer.
- Access, adapt, or build sports facilities outside of Erie and Niagara County (ice rinks, pools, tennis courts, and indoor fields).
- Grow access to and participation in sports like swimming among youth who have low rates of swimming experience and ability (Black and Hispanic/Latinx children), given the high concentration of pools in Erie County.
- Leverage support from private donors and regional sports heroes to offer free participation in town leagues (e.g., soccer).

Think Small

- Plan and begin repairs of recreational facilities. Many recreational facilities are in need of repair; tackle one at a time through community, non-profit, and funder support.
- Provide transportation support to access parks that are only accessible via car. Consider the development of new parks in areas accessible by foot, bike, or public transportation.
- Address the challenge of upkeep of a space once developed given the limitations of city parks budget to maintain existing parks.
- Facilitate public-private partnerships to increase community access to sports through new and diversified facilities and parks that can host multiple sports (e.g., soccer, kickball, lacrosse, and rugby).
- Provide sport sampling in community schools as part of the out-of-school-hours youth sports programs.

Design For Development

- Tailor programs to be developmentally appropriate (e.g., Sabres Learn to Play Hockey program, Youth Advantage Buffalo, WNY Junior Soccer League).
- Build on the progress that has been made in adaptive sports and equipment and identify funding to support the higher costs of supporting special-needs children. e.g., adaptive playground equipment at more parks, adaptive summer camps, Skating Association for Blind and Handicapped (SABAH).
- Provide opportunities for youth with and without disabilities to participate together in sports (e.g. co-ed unified basketball as part of the Special Olympics Unified Schools initiative).
- Scale up the WNY Girls in Sports program into a year-round effort.

- Replicate models like the Seneca Nation's sports complexes that include lacrosse arenas, gyms, workout facilities, pools, and classrooms at low to no cost to community members to promote healthy and happy communities.

Train All Coaches

- Provide parent coaches with training in key competencies to work with youth.
- Assess background more holistically when evaluating volunteer coaches. For example, someone with a criminal record in their distant past may be an excellent coach and role model.
- Provide additional training to coaches who serve immigrant and refugee families to connect with the families of the youth and to understand cultural norms and customs (e.g., understanding nuances of body language, problem solving how to put a hockey helmet over a hijab).
- Facilitate access to information and opportunities to become certified as a coach by the state through the local Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).
- Improve parent education on sports, as they are often their child's first coach. This often occurs simultaneously with youth sports programming, as in soccer clinics offered by the UB School of Education and Buffalo Bills mom's clinics.

Emphasize Prevention

- Pass and enforce local laws for mandatory concussion safety courses for all coaches of youth in contact or collision sports. Provide training to parents, inclusive of parent coaches, of youth in these sports as well.
- Translate local research into practice. Leverage the expertise of concussion research experts in the region to continuously monitor and adapt sports programming to maximize the safety and health of the participating youth.
- Make coaching and training modifications in response to information about concussion and other injury risks from within and outside the region. This may include providing onsite athletic trainers at contact or collision sports events like football games.
- Advertise and utilize resources like the WNY Amateur Football Alliance, which was funded to supply protective equipment to youth and athletic trainers at games and offers safety clinics and coach training for modest fees.

Recommendations from State of Play in Southeast Michigan

(Note — these recommendations are summarized from the State of Play Southeast Michigan report (Aspen Institute. 2017a).)

Ask Kids What They Want

- Survey youth to find out what sports offerings they would like. Include sports that are not already being offered to ensure youth can suggest a wide variety of sports. Conduct focus groups to understand barriers to participation. This may reveal issues like safety, transportation, lack of access, and fear of judgment from peers and adults. It may also reveal the absence of staff to support youth sports programming.
- Implement post-program surveys to capture youth feedback. Encourage all youth to complete the surveys to ensure results are representative.
- Address the gender gap in sports offerings that emerges by middle school.
- Offset the cost of sports participation so that more youth are able to play. A \$25 fee to participate in track and field may still be too much for some families.

Reintroduce Free Play

- Expand and guarantee access to recess periods during the school day through initiatives like Playworks Michigan.
- Utilize the comprehensive toolkit from the state to implement constructive free play outside of school hours and establish shared-use agreements for community access to school facilities.
- Participate in the OpenStreets Project, where sections of major roadways are closed for a stretch of time and converted to free community activity spaces. Communities organize bike riding, yoga, hopscotch and celebrate the connection of city neighborhoods in the absence of these divisive highways.
- Promote play in city parks through the addition of multiple bins filled with balls.
- Allow time and space for loosely organized play in which youth can play unstructured games and make up the rules, without the close supervision of adults.

Encourage Sport Sampling

- Increase the supply of diverse sports activities to meet the youth demands, particularly among students of color. According to youth focus groups, this includes flag football, handball, golf, mountain biking, volleyball, and field hockey. Help parents understand the importance of delaying sport specialization until age 12 or later. Loosen try-out restrictions in elementary and middle-school sports to allow youth to learn as they play.



- Access, adapt, or build sports facilities, including indoor long fields, to ensure youth in all communities have access to indoor sports during the six months of the year when weather limits outdoor play. Continue to enhance bicycle infrastructure in cities like Detroit, incorporating it into their identity as a city of bikes.
- Combine sport sampling with youth and parent cultural awareness and education related to the many cultures represented in Southeast Michigan.

Revitalize In-Town Leagues

- Create public-private partnerships to revitalize the many closed recreation centers and city parks to offer programming like dodgeball, Frisbee, soccer, and basketball to the region's youth.
- Collaboratively address the loss of programs and closure of buildings related to the public schools' financial emergency a decade ago. This may include facilitating after-school program participation near ones' homes, providing transportation, and creating opportunities to meet and play with neighborhood children.
- To address the absence of municipality-led opportunities and facilities, create public-private partnerships in facility ownership and management and funding for non-profit organizations to provide youth sports opportunities.
- Provide single-sport camps at low to no cost for youth to have access to teams and nearby games.
- Increase equity in coach payment between school teams and club or private teams.
- Provide funding for lower-income youth to access additional training through participation in club teams.

Think Small

- Consider adapting spaces for action sports like skateboarding and BMX biking that appeal to youth who prefer less structured and supervised activities.
- Create coalitions, like the Detroit Greenways Coalition, that include businesses, nonprofits, and government organizations to develop and maintain city spaces that are safer for skaters, bikers, hikers, and joggers. This can also include the use of abandoned city spaces for activities like disc golf courses.
- Build on the progress that has been made in renovated parks that are accessible for wheelchairs and include adaptive equipment.
- Creatively reclaim empty lots, warehouses, and sheds for activities like indoor soccer and futsal.
- Plan and begin repairs of recreational facilities. Many recreational facilities are in need of repair; tackle one at a time through community, non-profit, and funder support.

Design For Development

- Leverage the expertise of the Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports in the planning and implementation of age-appropriate play opportunities in the region.
- Support the implementation of evidence-based programs like CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) that includes resources for fun age- and developmentally appropriate practices as well as training on healthy interactions with children and parents.
- Adapt best practices from national sports organizations like the use of rink dividers for young athletes to play ice hockey in appropriately sized rinks. Facilitate parental buy-in to these practices through communication and education.
- Build on the progress that has been made in providing a variety of adaptive sports and identify funding to support the higher costs of supporting special needs children. Continue the momentum moving away from adult-driven and overly competitive sports leagues through initiatives like Girls Changing the Game, Future Coaches Leadership Academy, and Detroit Police Athletic League (PAL).

Train All Coaches

- Ensure access to the many excellent coach training resources in the region through addressing barriers like high costs, time commitments, and lack of awareness.
- Replicate the successes seen in youth football coaches related to adequate and comprehensive coach training (including CPR, first aid, physical conditioning, safety and injury prevention, concussion management, sports skills and tactics, and motivational techniques). Remove any barriers to participation in training that are experienced by youth coaches in urban areas more than in suburban areas.

- Ensure coaches are trained in building relationships and supporting the psychosocial needs of youth and their families in addition to sports coaching. Youths report that their favorite coaches are involved in their lives and are interested in what's going on at home.
- Address the perceptions that female coaches are not as qualified as male coaches. This can be accomplished through the recruitment and training of more female coaches.

Emphasize Prevention

- Pass and enforce local laws for mandatory concussion safety courses for all coaches of youth in contact or collision sports. Provide training to parents, inclusive of parent coaches, of youth in these sports as well. To respond to the continued demand for tackle football, ensure coaching includes safe tackling form, concussion training, and education of parents. Organizations can also help parents understand that flag football is a safe alternative and does not hinder a child's progression in the sport. Partner with trusted community partners like health systems, private donors, and organizations like Detroit PAL to offer Concussion Health Awareness and Management Programming (CHAMP) to youth aged 13 and older.
- Grow access to and participation in sports like swimming among youth who have low rates of swimming experience and ability (African American/Black youth), given that many parts of Southeast Michigan are surrounded by water. Increase access to athletic trainers in urban and rural regions.



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Appendix A: Year 1 Qualitative Research

Since the introduction of Title IX in 1972, the sports participation gap between girls and boys has narrowed, but it has not disappeared entirely. The 2022 National State of Play report found that fewer than one-third of girls (31.3%) played a sport on a regular basis, compared to 38.0% of boys (Aspen Institute, 2022b). The gap is even more pronounced when factoring in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Girls of color are even less likely to participate in sports than boys of color or White girls. For example, a 2020 report found that 46.1% of Hispanic girls (vs. 36.9% of Hispanic boys) and 54.5% of Black girls (compared to 42.6% of Black boys) had never participated in a sport, compared to 39.9% of White girls (Zarrett et al., 2020). Girls from households with incomes under \$50,000 were even more likely to have never participated in sports (57.5%). LGBTQ+ girls and girls living with disabilities also face additional barriers to participation (Human Rights Campaign, 2017; Calzo et al., 2014; Clark & Kosciw, 2022a; Storr et al., 2022). And while some girls never start playing sports to begin with, many others begin but then drop out. Middle school is a critical time in which girls

stop playing sports at much higher rates than boys, a trend that may be related to the social experience of puberty, including gender stereotyping and negative male attention (Keathly et al., 2013). Addressing obstacles to access and retention is vital to closing the participation gap and ensuring that girls receive the support they need to have meaningful sports experiences.

The participation gap is a problem not only because girls deserve equal access to physical activity and sports, but also because sports have many well-documented benefits. It is well established in scholarly literature that physical activity and sports participation are associated with positive physical and mental health outcomes (e.g., Eigenschenk et al., 2019; Rebar et al., 2015), as well as improved grades and cognitive performance (Chang et al., 2012) and social and community engagement. Unequal participation means that girls are losing out on many of these important benefits.



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One way to begin to tackle the participation gap is by ensuring that girls have positive adult role models to help shape their sports experiences. Increasing the number of women coaches is an important step toward addressing girls' unique needs. Yet women coaches face their own obstacles, including barriers related to gender and intersecting identities such as race and socioeconomic status.

The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) is committed to understanding and addressing the obstacles to girls' participation in sports. From 2019 to 2022, the WSF funded the Regional Sports 4 Life Program for girls in under-resourced communities in Southeast Michigan (SEMI) and Western New York (WNY). Conversations with grantees, along with other community based organizations in both regions revealed a clear need to better understand the unique needs of girls in their communities, in order to provide greater access to high-quality, lasting opportunities for physical activity and sports. Through the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, WSF secured funding to conduct a three-year research initiative to investigate the extent and nature of two issues: (1) lack of access, engagement, and retention in sports and physical activity for girls in under-resourced communities and (2) challenges and barriers for women in coaching in WNY and SEMI. These issues are related because it is theorized that having women role models as coaches may engage and retain girls in sports. This research was conducted in partnership with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, as well as a panel of subject matter experts and leaders from the two regions.

This study was designed to take place over three years, with each year dedicated to a different phase of research. The first year was devoted to the collection of qualitative data through focus groups, interviews, and semi-structured surveys. In the second year, the research team conducted surveys of girls and women to measure some of the constructs discussed in the qualitative phase, as well as other documented factors that influence their sports and coaching participation. The third year was devoted to holding community dialogue and creating tools to support programs to better serve girls in sports and lower barriers to women's participation as coaches.

Starting in January 2023, Strength in Numbers Consulting, WSF's research partner, began the qualitative phase of the research, starting with interviews with local youth development and sports leaders from the two regions, followed by focus group discussions with middle and high school girls and semi-structured surveys with women coaches. This research uncovered several common themes and challenges that can help guide further research and programmatic solutions to the unique barriers that prevent girls from having positive and lasting sports experiences.

This report presents an overview of the study's year-one findings, which have been integrated to summarize key themes and issues that arose during this phase of research. Findings related to girls' experiences in sports (RA1) are presented first, including girls' perspectives on participating in sports—what they love, what they find challenging, and what they need

to make their sports and physical activity experiences more accessible and rewarding. The next section reviews findings from interviews and semi-structured surveys of current and former women coaches (RA2), including their motivations for being a coach, what they find fulfilling about their experiences, challenges with coaching, and what they need to stay engaged. The report concludes with a section focusing on recommendations for how to carry this work forward, in terms of both further research and programming.

Research Objectives

The overarching objectives of this research initiative were to (1) investigate all factors that impact access, engagement, and retention of girls in quality sports experiences, with special focus on factors contributing to the dropout rate, and (2) examine and document all factors that can increase the number of female coaches in youth sports. The research team developed two sets of research questions through the qualitative phase. Interviews with regional sports leaders and subject matter experts aimed to answer the first set of research objectives:

- to understand the local challenges and facilitators for underserved girls in sports' (Research Area 1, or RA1);
- to understand the local challenges and facilitators to increasing the number of women in coaching roles (Research Area 2, or RA2); and
- to identify and fine-tune areas of research that will benefit the project's long-term objectives.

Based on the outcomes of the interviews and review of the literature, it was clear that middle school girls faced the greatest obstacles to ongoing participation in sports and physical activity. For the qualitative data collection through focus groups with girls, the research objectives were expanded to include the following:

- to identify what conditions are necessary to facilitate ongoing engagement in physical activity for middle school girls (RA1); and
- to understand the factors that push girls out of sports and physical activity in middle school and how they make decisions about participation (RA1).

1 Many populations—including LGBTQ+ girls, girls of color, immigrants, those living in rural areas, and those with physical disabilities—lack appropriate services and programming for their needs. While recognizing that a more nuanced approach will be necessary, this research began with a set of ideas about marginalization to explore the effects of identity on access to sports.

Methodology

Interviews with Regional Sports Leaders

From January to February 2023, Strength in Numbers Consulting conducted 13 interviews with Project Play Western New York and Project Play Southeast Michigan leadership, local subject matter experts, sports program leaders (some from WSF Regional Sports4Life Grantees), and coaches in both regions. Interviewees were selected with the aim of representing the concerns of diverse populations, with leadership from programs that serve girls of color, immigrants, rural areas, and other historically underserved populations. Most of the programs included had previously or currently had girl-specific initiatives or hoped to implement them in the future. Half (7) of the interviewees were current or former coaches of youth sports teams.

Interviews were conducted using Zoom and recorded. Conversations lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. All participants provided verbal consent to recordings, which were transcribed using Otter.ai. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and then imported into Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software, and coded using both inductive and deductive codes.

Focus Groups with Middle and High School Girls

In May and June 2023, the research team conducted seven focus groups with 64 middle and high school girls in urban and rural areas of WNY (4) and SEMI (3). The focus groups were organized by Project Play community partners in both regions. Using a convenience sampling approach, partner organizations were approached based on their relationships with Project Play teams and their expressed interest in improving sports opportunities for girls. The partners prepared recruitment materials that were shared via email and social media. Four of the focus groups were held during a time when girls would already be gathered (including after a volleyball clinic and during an after-school program), and three were standalone events where the partners recruited participants through targeted outreach. Partner organizations notified parents that a researcher would be coming to talk to the girls about sports and were given the option to have their child opt out of the session.

Focus groups participants were:

- Participants in a volleyball clinic at a YMCA (1)
- Girls who had participated in a local sports and youth development organization in the past (2)
- A group of high school athletes in rural New York (1)
- Girls from a high school gym class (1)
- Girls in an after-school program with running and sports sampling (2)

The 64 girls who participated in the focus groups ranged in age from 8 to 18, with the median age being 12. Nearly half (48%,

$n=31$) were Black, 33% were White, 9% were Arab American, 8% were Indigenous, and 2% were Latina. Eighty-four percent of participants were currently playing sports (or had in the last year), while 16% were not.

The focus group questions centered on girls' sports experiences, including what they loved about sports, what they found challenging, why they saw others leaving sports and physical activity, and what they needed to stay engaged in sports. Participants were also asked about their experiences in gym class, which can shape how girls feel about physical activity. Several questions centered on what was needed from coaches and parents, who play a major role in shaping girls' experiences with sports.

All focus groups were audio-recorded with consent from participants and their parents. Recordings were then transcribed by a professional transcription company. Transcripts were imported into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. A coding scheme was developed inductively (based on the research questions) and deductively (based on what emerged in the conversations) and was used to code each transcript. Three transcripts were coded by one researcher and reviewed by a second to ensure consistent code definitions and applications.

Semi-Structured Survey With Women Coaches

To understand the challenges faced by women in coaching, the research team had initially planned to hold several online focus groups but was unable to find participants after extensive outreach. In conversations with women coaches, several indicated they wanted to support the research, but were unable to participate in a focus group due to competing priorities related to work, family, and coaching. Because the initial interview phase included seven current or former women coaches, the research team felt there was a strong base to build from and decided to shift approaches. Using Google Forms, the research team created a survey with open-ended questions asking about women's coaching experiences, what they found challenging and rewarding, and what additional support they needed to stay engaged as coaches. The semi-structured survey was then shared with partner organizations in both locations. It was open from June 21 to July 21, 2023.

Twenty women coaches completed the online survey. Twelve (60%) were from Michigan, and eight were from Western New York. Over half (55%, $n=11$) were White, 30% ($n=6$) were Black, and 15% ($n=3$) were Arab American. Survey participants included women with experience coaching traditional sports such as swimming, football, soccer, volleyball, softball, lacrosse, field hockey, as well as coaches of less common sports, such as roller derby and fishing. Twelve (60%) had seven or more years of experience coaching, four (20%) had four to six years of experience, and another four (20%) had three or fewer years of experience. Almost all (90%, $n=18$) had coached within the past year. The majority (65%) were paid to coach, while the remaining 35% were volunteers. Survey respondents had coached boys, girls, and mixed-gender teams for athletes at a range of levels, from pre-elementary school through college.

Observations

To augment the formal data collection, a member of the research team attended several events through Project Play Southeast Michigan, including the Project Play Southeast Michigan Coalition Kick-off, Girls in Sports Working Group Meetings, and the Girls on the Run Southeastern Michigan 5k. Notes were taken during and after the events. A few examples of findings from these activities are also incorporated below.

Findings: Girls in Sports

This section details the findings from the focus groups with middle and high school girls. These conversations focused primarily on three key topics: what girls loved about sports, the challenges they experienced, especially as a result of sexism, and what might cause some girls to leave sports.

What Girls Love About Sports

The girls in these focus groups emphasized how much they enjoyed sports. Girls viewed participating in sports and physical activity as offering an array of valuable benefits, including the opportunity to build new and lasting friendships, learn new skills, and pass their time productively.

The friendships that girls formed with their teammates were one of the most frequently mentioned “favorite” aspects of sports. As one high schooler in WNY explained, *“Just being around [my team], and we’re all playing our best and having fun. If it doesn’t go the best, it’s fine because we’re still with each other.”* In WNY, in a group of girls who had participated in a Girls on the Run program, a middle schooler was looking forward to the upcoming 5K race: *“I’m excited because we get to run as a team. It’s gonna be fun running as a team because we’ve grown big friendships together.”* These ties to their teammates were

frequently mentioned when girls were asked what kept them coming back to sports when things were difficult.

Girls also frequently noted that sports gave them important opportunities to improve their athletic abilities, learn new things, and witness growth—both in themselves and others. During discussions with high school athletes in rural New York, two lacrosse players explained:

Participant 1: For me, for lacrosse, [the thing that keeps me coming back] is probably the love of the sport and those little wins. Even if we don’t win the game, we might have personal wins or a team win. A lotta the games, we don’t win, but our team has come so far from the beginning.

Participant 2: We’ve gotten so much better.

Participant 1: We had to teach our younger girls from not even knowing how to hold the stick. Now, they’re playing full games.

Participant 2: Yeah, I think [the thing that keeps me coming back] is seeing where we’re gonna progress forward, even if we’re not on the team [after graduation], just to be able to look back. We helped start that.

While girls acknowledged that sports could be difficult, they found improving their skills to be incredibly rewarding. When asked why they kept coming back to their activities, one participant in SEMI reflected on her experience in step dance: *“Cause it’s fun. I find step very easy, but sometimes, it can be hard. ... I would like to learn the step really quickly, but I can’t do that. That’s why [I keep coming back].”*

Although a less common response, several girls mentioned that participating in sports provided them with a positive alternative to other ways they might spend their time. As one middle schooler in WNY said, *“I feel like, too — ‘cause I just be doin’ little stuff that just gets me in trouble — easy little things that I could’ve avoided. Now that I’m here two extra hours — I’m at school for two extra hours — it’s 120 minutes of things that I could’ve did that I don’t do.”* A high schooler in rural WNY explained, *“People like to get outta house because not everyone has a good home life. It gives them a chance to get away from the things they’re experiencing at home and be not a different person but express themselves in ways they couldn’t before.”*

Challenges With Boys, Sexism, and the Competitive Nature of Sports

In addition to sharing what they loved about sports, focus group participants were also asked to explain the challenges they encountered when participating in sports and physical activity. Several common issues emerged from these conversations, including the scrutiny and teasing girls experienced from boys, as well as sexism from coaches, gym teachers, parents, and peers. Girls’ attitudes towards competition were mixed; some enjoyed having the opportunity to compete, while others disliked the pressure associated with it.



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Several of the major challenges that focus group participants noted were related to mixed-gender sports and physical activity. Girls' main complaints included boys ignoring girls during games, playing too aggressively, and scrutinizing girls. One middle schooler in WNY talked about the frustrations of being excluded by boys during gym class: *"[I]f they're playing soccer or something — it doesn't matter if you guys are friends — they'll just pretty much ignore you. It's not even like they won't pass you the ball. It's like you're not there."* Another middle schooler in WNY stated her dislike of mixed-gender sports this way: *"I don't really like bein' mixed with the boys, sometimes; ... the boys get too rough. Sometimes, they start off stuff, and they might hit you on accident, or sometimes they do it on purpose. They don't apologize or say 'sorry.'"* A middle schooler in SEMI explained, *"I feel like the boys are always interfering in the games. If we're playing volleyball, they always come in and take the ball away from you, and if I miss or mess up one time, they're like, 'You're off the squad.'"*

Another common frustration was the feeling that boys were watching and judging them, which made the girls feel self-conscious. A group of middle schoolers in WNY had the following exchange:

Interviewer: What do you worry about [when playing with boys] that you don't have to worry about with girls?

Participant 1: Not being inappropriate.

Participant 2: Doing jumping jacks. Because boys are looking at you while you're doing jumping jacks, right? They'll give you a side-eye. Just stop lookin' at me!

A high school runner in WNY talked about her team's experience using a new weight room: *"When we go in there for track, we're all in there, but there's the football boys that are in there training and all that. It makes you feel uncomfortable 'cause it's like, 'Okay, well, now, they're stopping their workouts to watch everybody and see what we're doing.'"*

Two girls had the following conversation about their experiences with boys in gym class:

Participant 1: [The boys in gym] think they are better than everyone. ... That's what everybody says—

Participant 2: — because the boys are so athletic, and the —

Participant 1: The girls are trash.

Participant 2: No, because the girls — no, it's not because the girls are trash. It's just because the girls are more — they're athletic, but they're athletic in a different way than boys. ... Some girls are tomboys. Some girls are girly girls. They do think boys are better than girls though because boys have more experience [than] girls. ... [In gym class] I feel like, since we have more athletic boys in our class — because most boys play baseball, most boys

play soccer, most boys play basketball or football or something and only the girls, basically, do cheer, gymnastics, dance. I don't feel like it's — I wouldn't say fair, but I don't feel like we're getting the same (sighs heavily) — I just don't like it.

This exchange demonstrates awareness that boys may be perceived as better athletes, but that this is in many ways unfair.

Most of the focus group participants preferred to play only with other girls, and even those who enjoyed some aspects of mixed-gender teams expressed frustration about how boys treated girls in general. Some also told stories about being poorly treated themselves. Boys were widely seen as not playing cooperatively with girls and keeping the ball to themselves; being too rough, aggressive, or competitive; and watching and judging girls.

In four of the focus groups, girls talked about their experiences of being on mixed-gender teams, either because the school teams were small or because the sports were ones traditionally popular with boys (football, wrestling). In two cases, girls talked about feeling ostracized because of the gender imbalance, with boys excluding them, ignoring them, or complaining to the coaches about having a girl on the team. At one high school in WNY, a participant reflected on how alienating it was to be on a team that was predominantly boys:

"Yeah, there was a cross-country team. Besides me, there was only, maybe, one other girl that was constantly there. There was more guys than girls. I [stayed on the team] but mainly because it was too late to turn back. I might [be on the team again next year]. It depends on—I don't know. It just depends. If there's going to be, again, a whole thing where there's more boys than girls, then I'm not doin' it because I'm not really good at running. Also, it didn't really help that there wasn't a lot of female support. The coach was a male. There were more males there. ... If there's only one girl, you couldn't really talk to anybody."

Although most of the focus group conversations centered on girls' frustrations, some participants enjoyed certain aspects of mixed-gender sports. Those who liked playing with boys appreciated being able to play with all of their friends regardless of gender; the increased number of players, which could allow for team sports like football; and boys' athletic abilities, which girls felt helped them to improve their skills.

Of the two focus group participants who reported enjoying playing with boys, both attributed their positive experiences to their coaches' leadership in creating a welcoming space where they felt valued, no matter their skill level. As one middle schooler in SEMI explained, *"In flag football ... and the coach, I feel like he knew how to include you, but we would lose every single game, but he would all make us feel included. Even if you were bad or anything, he would still give you a starting position so you still start on some games. He just makes you feel really included, even though we'd lose it pretty bad. It's one of my favorite teams, but we lose."*

Participants also talked about facing double standards and sexism from boys, coaches, gym teachers, parents, and even other girls. Girls felt they needed to perform better than the boys to receive the same treatment, and that their mistakes were less tolerated. As one high school athlete in WNY explained, *“I think that girls also get intimidated by the fact of playing a sport because it’s a lot harder to be a girl in a sport because you feel like you have so much more to prove to everybody else. ... It feels like, no matter how good you feel, the girls just always are not seen as good as the boys.”*

In the group with high school athletes in rural New York, the girls reflected on the shared experience of being teased and not taken seriously by the boys’ teams.

Participant 1: For the lacrosse girls, we hear a lot from the boys’ team. It’s like, “Oh, you guys lost? What do you mean you lost? Why’d you lose?”

Participant 2: We hear it at races all the time. We’ve had [boys from] other teams come and be just like, “Oh, the times aren’t as fast as our girls,” or stuff like that.

Participant 3: Or even with baseball boys with our softball team, a bunch of boys. ... tell Sadie — ‘cause Sadie pitches — like, “Oh, I could take you yard and home run right away.” They don’t give us any credit.

In addition to issues related to sexism, the overall pressure associated with competition was another challenge that came up frequently in focus group discussions. Overall, focus group participants had varying opinions about whether competition was something they enjoyed, enjoyed only sometimes, or didn’t like at all. While some said it was their favorite part of sports, others hated the pressure, and many fell somewhere in between. While the fun of pushing themselves and their teams to win was hugely rewarding, losing could be devastating. For example, a middle schooler in WNY explained her ambivalent attitude toward competition, stating, *“I like it being competitive, but at the same time, I don’t. ... It doesn’t sound like it’ll be that much pressure put on to you, but it is. But then again, I like it. It’s a win or lose thing, and you count the points and stuff like that. We were undefeated the whole season. ... That feels good.”*

Aspects of Sports That Lead Girls to Quit

In addition to general challenges, focus group participants discussed the main reasons that girls stopped participating in sports and physical activity. Other than availability of sports, structural and environmental barriers — for example, a lack of transportation or the cost of participation — came up in conversations. Because the focus groups centered more on personal challenges participants and their peers faced, these were not a priority of the group discussions. Below are the main themes discussed in the focus groups, which include interpersonal conflict, the difficulty of balancing competing responsibilities, and the physical and emotional demands associated with playing sports.

Interpersonal Issues Between Peers Push a Lot of Girls Out of Sports

One of the most common reasons that girls quit sports was conflict with their teammates. Considering the value many of the respondents placed in relationships and connections to their teams, it is unsurprising that girls who didn’t have that experience did not want to continue playing. As a middle schooler in Michigan described:

“[O]ne of the girls on my team here at the Y — one of them quit early because she said she had somethin’ better to do herself, but I think it was ‘cause the other teams were laughing at her ‘cause she wasn’t the best at it ‘cause she just started playing. ... I’m not gonna lie, I did say somethin’ to her about her playing ‘cause there was other players that are better than her. Instead of tryin’ to be better, she sat there. ... Every time she missed one while she was there, she would just be so rude about it.”

Even when interpersonal conflict didn’t lead girls to quit, it could erode team cohesion and put a damper on their sports experiences. A group of high schoolers in rural WNY discussed how conflict with teammates leads some girls to quit:

Participant 1: Also, your teammates will point you out for doing something you know you’re doing wrong.

Participant 2: I think a lotta girls, too, can go away from sports because of drama too.

[Multiple participants murmur agreement]

Participant 3: Especially with girl sports. I know that’s really common. It is.

Participant 2: A lotta feelings involved.

Participant 4: It’s very emotional.



Some Girls Are Expelled From Their Teams as a Form of Discipline

A small number of focus group participants talked about girls leaving sports because they were expelled from teams for various reasons: getting into fights outside of sports, getting low grades, or missing practices. For example, one high schooler from Michigan explained why some girls were removed from their teams: *“Cause people like to fight. ... That’s why most people quit from high school. ... That happened durin’ the volleyball season ‘cause my friend were doin’ the season, and one of the girls hit my friend. She got into a fight, and she couldn’t play anymore.”*

While some might view this type of disciplinary response as preferable to other forms of punishment, such as expelling girls from school or involving the criminal justice system, barring girls from participating sends a message that sports are “extras” or “privileges” rather than core to girls’ well-being. The impacts of this practice may extend beyond the individual involved, sending the message that sports are not as important as other activities and thereby discouraging other girls from participating.

Girls Struggle to Balance Competing Responsibilities

Similar to the interviews with individual key informants, girls also talked about struggling to balance competing responsibilities, which made participation in sports challenging. Some girls mentioned being required to do chores in the evening or needing to watch younger siblings or cousins while their parents worked. One girl in SEMI explained why she didn’t play on the basketball team at her school: *“If I would make [the basketball team], I’d be at it every single day till 8:30, and I can’t manage that because I have siblings. I have a family, and I have things to do after school.”*

Some Girls Struggle With Feelings of Inadequacy

Sports are difficult to learn, and girls who are just starting out don’t have the skills to be competitive yet. This difficulty is compounded if the team they are joining has more-experienced players. While many girls emphasized development and growth as highlights of participating in sports, they were also discouraged by feelings of not being “good enough.” As a middle schooler in SEMI explained, *“I feel like mental health is definitely a big factor ‘cause sports really are straining ... say, like if you have a bad game or you think you had a bad game or you think you did something wrong. It’s just the easiest thing that can happen within your sport that can just mess with your thoughts.”*

Sports Are Physically and Emotionally Demanding

One of the things girls discussed — which might be taken for granted—is that sports can be extremely difficult physically, which in turn influences girls’ mental health and their feelings about the sports. Focus group participants discussed how these physical demands could take some of the fun out of sports.

As one competitive track middle schooler in SEMI stated, *“I’m gonna say [girls leave teams because of] the intense training where your body starts to get tired. The older that you get, your body starts to change, and it hurts more when you do more intense training.”* Girls also discussed others leaving sports or having to sit out due to injuries. As one high schooler in rural WNY said,

“I cheer two outta the three seasons. A lotta the girls that cheer, cheer for both football and basketball season. We’re spending so much time together. ... The girls tend to get a lot more stressed because they’re getting thrown into different spots. We don’t always have the most amount of time to put together our [routines]. We had a lotta injuries this season. The girls were just getting snippy and mean with each other. ... It was a lot of, ‘I can’t do this because of this person.’”

Sports Get Too Serious and Stop Being Fun

When talking about what pushed them to quit playing sports, girls pointed to a variety of forces that took the fun out of participating. Even those who were “skilled” in their sports felt pressure to perform from teammates, parents, and coaches. They also echoed that it was a level of pressure that was just too much for kids. As one eighth grader in SEMI who was in competitive track and swimming explained:

“My parents, they’re all about sports. I don’t ever have that much fun. Many kids, especially on traveling teams, we’re traveling everywhere. You have to meet a certain expectation. When I’m doing swimming or track, the girls don’t get to have any fun. It’s all swimming, track. You gotta practice this day. No, you have a meet this day. ... I like swimming and track because I like to work out, but it’s not fun. How much energy you put into it; you can’t be a kid no more because you can’t have fun. It’s all swimming. It’s all track. It’s practice, practice.”

Several girls talked about how, with other responsibilities, commitments, and the stresses of school and family, sports did not always feel worth it. As one high schooler in WNY explained, *“It be the peer pressure, or just havin’ to endure it every day ‘cause it’s also a lotta physical pain that comes with it, a lotta long-term pain that you have to think about. It could be a lot on the kid ‘cause I’m still a kid. I got all this goin’ on, and I gotta juggle school and a home life. It could be a lot.”*

Sports can be difficult, both physically and emotionally. Faced with challenges, including interpersonal conflict, feelings of inadequacy, the pressure of competition, and the difficulty of balancing games and practice with schoolwork and caretaking responsibilities, some girls end up quitting sports for good.

One way to help girls manage the difficulties that come with playing sports is to provide them with coaches who understand the unique challenges of being a girl in sports. The following section details the research findings on how to increase the representation of women in coaching.

Findings: Women in Coaching

Women coaches provide girls with positive role models and an understanding of the particular challenges that girls in sports face. The interviews and semi-structured surveys revealed multiple benefits of having women as coaches, as well as common obstacles to recruiting and retaining women into these roles. Women coaches are adept at creating positive sports experiences for girls, but they also face their own obstacles surrounding sexism, double standards, and competing responsibilities.

Reasons Women Enjoy and Excel at Coaching

Women in coaching were asked why they decided to become coaches, what they felt their strengths were, and what their athletes appreciated about them. Below are the key themes from their responses.

They Love Sports and Are Motivated to Have a Positive Impact on Girls They Coach

In the interviews and surveys, many coaches talked about the value that sports brought to their lives and expressed a desire to support others in having positive experiences. Women coaches also discussed wanting to coach because they knew the power coaches — good or bad — have in shaping kids' sports experiences. As one soccer coach in WNY explained, *"I played soccer all my life and through college. ... I wanted to be able to provide access to soccer to kids and girls who might not have it due to barriers and be able to be a supportive, positive mentor in their life during their soccer experience."* Another coach from Michigan said, *"I grew up playing sports, and I know how important it is to have a good experience with your coach. I love children, and I now have children of my own who love sports, so I wanted to stay involved by coaching and giving back."*



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Women Coaches Are Intentional About Creating Positive, Constructive Team Environments

Respondents described the many ways that they prioritized understanding their athletes, building relationships with them, establishing a supportive team environment, and having clear and consistent communication. One coach in WNY described herself this way: *"I am encouraging, empathetic, and supportive, and keep things fun. I take the time to learn about them and listen to them about life or soccer-related requests."* A coach in SEMI explained her approach similarly: *"I try to always put the kids first and understand why they play. I've coached at a lot of different levels, and the kids play for different reasons at different levels. ... I work to know them as people and try to communicate clearly and consistently."*

Women Coaches Are Adept at Making Learning Sports Fun

Many of the respondents — especially those who were lifelong athletes with extensive experience — felt their ability to break skills down to make them easier to learn was one of their greatest strengths. They recognized that learning a sport can be difficult and frustrating, and helping children build their skills piece by piece and making it fun are key to keeping kids engaged. One former soccer coach from SEMI said, *"My strength is breaking down fundamental skills into manageable drills and making practice really fun."* Another coach in WNY reflected, *"I think the kids appreciate that I can be fun and still teach them skills for the sports they play."*

Women Coaches Emphasize Fun and Personal Development More Than Men Coaches

In the open-ended survey, women coaches shared that they felt their approach differed from the men they saw coaching in several significant ways. They characterized their male colleagues as more intense, with an emphasis on winning and competition. In contrast, many of the women coaches said they emphasized positive reinforcement and building relationships with their athletes. As one coach in SEMI explained, *"I think I have a balanced approach to coaching and do not overreact in situations. Remain calm and try to pass that along to my athletes."* A coach from WNY said, *"Yes, I think male coaches (some) are a little tougher. I am not personally one to ever really yell at my team. I believe there are other ways to approach accountability."*

Coaches emphasized that, having been girls in sports themselves, they understood the unique challenges that girls face and recognized how important it is to keep them engaged. A lacrosse coach in SEMI said, *"I am very open. My girls know they can come to me at any time. I do not pick favorites; I have the same set of standards and rules for all."* As a high school coach in SEMI stated, *"I think I am more understanding of the struggles girl athletes must overcome because I was once in those girls' shoes."*

Challenges to Recruiting Women in Coaching

Interviews and surveys with current and former coaches gave some insights into why recruiting women to coach can be difficult. One key barrier is that many women don't feel they are qualified to coach, even when they have the same level of experience as their male counterparts. Recruiting women from underserved backgrounds can be particularly challenging.

Women Don't See Themselves as Coaches

Women often think they need a certain amount of experience to become a coach, even at the pre-elementary school or elementary school levels. Women who do have experience with a particular sport may not see their skills as transferable to other sports. Several interviewees pointed out that men don't feel the same way and are often more eager and available to volunteer their time. One coach in SEMI explained:

"Men think they can coach anything. ... You know the stat about how men apply for jobs, whether or not they're qualified. And women are like, 'Oh, no, I don't have this. I don't have this.' And, so, I think some of that shows up a little bit, too. And like the coaching, men are just like, 'Sure I'll do it. I know. I played all the sports. I can do this.' Where women don't do that. They're like, 'Oh, no, I don't know anything about that sport. I can't. I can't coach that.' Yeah, well, you can. And it's not as hard as you think it is."

Women From Underserved Backgrounds Face More Barriers to Entering Coaching

Interviewees also discussed the particular challenges of recruiting women from underserved backgrounds, who are less likely to have had access to sports opportunities or to see themselves as coaches. These obstacles are compounded by additional care-taking responsibilities and less job flexibility compared to women from middle-income families or women who do not have to work to support their families.

Challenges to Retaining Women in Coaching

Women coaches face specific hurdles. In addition to recruiting more women into these roles, increasing the number of women coaches will also require attention to gender-specific barriers to retaining women coaches. The most common challenge women coaches mentioned was balancing coaching responsibilities and schedules with professional and personal commitments, followed by having their credibility undermined and not feeling equipped to handle the unique needs of the girls they coach.

Coaching Can Be Financially Untenable

Many of the coaches who were interviewed or participated in the open-ended survey were volunteering their time, while others were paid for coaching on a part-time basis and had other jobs and careers. Women who talked about balancing coaching with other jobs often highlighted that they were only

able to do so because they didn't have children of their own, or their children were grown. As one coach in WNY explained, *"Youth coaching is not a full-time job, so women in this field leave due to time constraints and their careers taking them in a different direction."*

Having a Family and Coaching Are Often Incompatible for Women

For many women coaches at all levels, having children was considered incompatible with the schedules, financial realities, and logistics of being a coach. In competitive sports with daily practices in the afternoons and evenings and games/competitions on the weekends, many mothers—even those with supportive partners—must find childcare for their children. As one coach in SEMI reflected, *"Gender roles are real, and the woman has to balance a four-day road trip in a different way than men do."*

Even coaches of younger, less competitive teams mentioned childcare as one of their biggest obstacles to staying in coaching. One coach from SEMI talked about the difficulty of only coaching for a few hours a week: *"My husband travels a lot for work, so sometimes childcare makes [coaching swimming] tough. Getting a babysitter is \$15 an hour, and I only make \$25 an hour as a coach. Luckily, I am an assistant coach, and, if I am not there, other coaches can fill in."*

Women Coaches Feel Their Credibility Is Often Undermined

One of the common challenges women coaches discussed was feeling their expertise questioned by administration, parents, and other coaches. This often took the form of unsolicited advice. Several of those who discussed this issue said they didn't think they would be treated the same way if they were men. One coach in WNY described it this way:

"I think the most frustrating part of coaching was being questioned or criticized by those who don't coach. Coaching is a unique profession where those who don't coach think they know how and tend to share their thoughts more freely. People don't tell their dentist how to fix their cavity, but, for some reason, people all think they can tell coaches how to coach."

A volleyball coach in SEMI with 20 years of coaching experience noted that parents could be a major source of frustration:

"[Kids'] personalities, I can deal with that. Done it all. ... But if parents just stay out of it, and just let me deal with it, then I'm fine. But once they step in, yeah, it's just ... I've done all these things for team cohesion, and we could just be good. And then a parent comes in and says, 'So why would you actually do that? Last year this, last year that. Why this, why that?' And it's like, after everything that I've worked on."

Women Coaches Don't Feel Equipped to Address Girls' Social and Personal Challenges

Women coaches said they found it difficult to fully support student-athletes, particularly when it came to mental health challenges. After one focus group, one woman shared that, as a coach, she also had to perform the role of friend, mentor, and therapist for her team. While she valued the closeness, she also felt that it required additional work—work that she wasn't trained for. In the interviews, several seasoned coaches talked about feeling that they did not have the skills or resources to deal with athletes' emotional needs. One coach from SEMI explained:

"This generation is so very different. ... Last year, I thought I was gonna have to quit coaching. Because there were so many tears. And I use a lot of sarcasm, and girls don't get the sarcasm. Girls were stepping out of practice, like, they're so used to getting what they want, and their parents have supported them so much like they don't know how to fail. ... And, so, I was like, I can't deal with this. ... I don't know how to handle all of this happening. At one time I had a girl, we were at a tournament, and all we were doing was keeping score, and her hand was physically shaking from her anxiety. And so like, even that conversation about girls who have diagnosed anxiety, oh, my gosh ... I gotta get some new skills."

Another coach from SEMI echoed this sentiment: *"I think recently student-athlete mental health has been a challenge. I think there have started to become more issues as well with diversity and inclusion. I think coaches need to be provided with ample resources to be able to effectively help athletes who bring up concerns in these areas."*

Interviews and surveys indicated that women coaches face unique and intersecting challenges that make it difficult to keep up their work in the long term. Overall, a lack of support and resources, financial and otherwise, is a major barrier to keeping women in coaching. However, this research also pointed to various promising approaches to recruiting and retaining women in these roles, which can be found in the recommendations section of this report.

Research Limitations

One challenge of this research was recruiting diverse participants in each region while limiting the size of each focus group. For example, only two focus groups were held in rural areas, one in each region. Only one group had a substantial proportion of girls from families that had immigrated to the United States, and of those, almost all were from the Middle East and North Africa. Ideally, the research would have been able to look at the unique needs and barriers experienced by girls of different immigration statuses and from different countries of origin, sexual and gender minorities, and different racial and ethnic backgrounds. While saturation—the point in qualitative research at which no new themes are emerging—was reached for some themes overall, it could not be reached for the specific subgroups of underserved girls.



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The focus groups were primarily recruited through youth sports and development partners, and most of the participants were currently engaged in sports. While 14% of the participants were not currently on a team, they were in groups with girls who were in sports, so the conversations often focused on those experiences.

Due to the focus group format, the ages of the girls, and their being from the same schools/programs, some sensitive topics that are known to influence girls' experiences with physical activity were not explored in-depth. For example, body image, appearance, and how girls' perceptions of themselves influence their motivations for being in sports/working out were not intentionally brought up. These topics could be explored with subsequent research.

Challenges With Data Collection for Focus Groups

While attempts were made to ensure appropriate spaces for the focus groups, there were challenges with the sound in some instances. For instance, one group had to be relocated from a classroom to the gym, where the echoes made some parts of the discussion difficult to transcribe. Another group was in a classroom with a partition, and there was an elementary tumbling class on the other side. The size of the groups and the eagerness with which many girls responded meant that participants were often cutting each other off. In large groups it was also difficult to consistently identify individual speakers, so following individual responses throughout the recordings and transcripts was challenging.

Programmatic Considerations

In addition to providing direction for the next phase of this project, the findings presented in this report offer some insights into steps that could be taken now to ensure that new and existing programs better support both girls in sports and women in coaching.

Recommendations Benefiting Both Girls in Sports and Women in Coaching

The research findings highlighted two key challenges affecting representation and retention of both girl athletes and women coaches: lack of awareness and lack of funding. This section describes interventions that could address these issues, including creating talking points to educate the public and specific audiences about the needs of girls in sports and targeting funding specifically to support girl-centric programs and pay coaches a sustainable wage.

The lack of awareness of the importance of providing girls with programs that address their needs is a significant barrier. Several partners mentioned that **key messages or talking points** would be useful in order to educate people around the needs of girls in sports and women in coaching. For example, one of the possible projects that the Project Play Southeast Michigan Girls in Sports working group would like to undertake is to create an awareness campaign, but they lack the data, tools, and funding to do so.

Strategies to help programs build awareness would help address a challenge identified in the qualitative data collection process. While many of the adult leaders interviewed were dedicated to improving access and retention of girls in sports,

they also observed that recognition of this concern that was not shared across the field of youth sports and development. This was also observed directly by the researcher. One group interview with several (mostly male) leaders from a large youth sports and development program in a mid-sized city in SEMI was asked about how they were responding to the needs of girls in their programming. They emphasized that they wanted to see all kids being active and emphasized overall inclusivity, but didn't prioritize engaging girls, even when girls were underrepresented in their programs.

The regional sports leaders interviewed were clear that this research needs to eventually lead to a **commitment to fund local girl-centric sports** and physical activity programs. Many gender-conscious programs are underfunded or only have a limited amount of time in which to show an impact. A program leader from WNY explained:

"[What] I envisioned was a series of workshops where [we] walk through this research with these groups of women who are leaders and the youth that are connected to their programs. And, as a result of the research, they come up with a program model, and we have a grant hot and waiting, like ... we know we're going to fund the ideas that come out of this, because we know we're providing you with all of this rich content, and you're going to build something that's really awesome."

Relatedly, funding coaches at a sustainable level would benefit both the coaches and the girls who would see the same faces year after year. Turnover was a major issue for each of the sites studied. One seasoned leader from SEMI observed the importance of continuity in leadership:

"[Successfully engaging girls in sports] has been connected to who has been involved, like who was the adult leader in that space. And so then, ideally, that person sets up structure and processes that continue, whether or not they're there, then that hasn't always happened is that the person's gone, and it all kind of falls apart. And so that, obviously, that becomes a challenge to overcome ... to keeping that continuity within the space."

Girl-centric programs often rely on the unpaid and emotional labor of committed women. Many programs are started by one dedicated individual and/or with specialized funding. Interviews and focus groups highlighted many examples of teams and programs that had been established by one or two people committed to improving sports for girls. One interviewee who had started a girls' basketball program in WNY explained, "I literally had to make my own flyers and take them to the schools and ask the teachers or phys-ed people. ... I had to do a lot more work to fill the spots than the boys' league. ... [We] still had to work pretty hard to form a base." Rather than relying on the hard work of a few individuals, girl-centric programming must be a sustained, collective effort.



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Funding could be directed especially toward girls who experience intersectional barriers to participation. Because current funding for low-income and marginalized communities is so limited, it is considered “normal” to fund only mixed-gender teams and not attend to girls’ specific needs. As one program leader working with underserved youth in SEMI noted:

“When I first started, I did some actual surveying and data synthesis. ... [The gender disparity] was something that maybe people didn’t even realize was [an issue] at first. And, you know, when we look at the actual numbers, which I just reviewed with our team yesterday, our current programs are going are 65% of boys and 35% girls. I think some of our coaching staff were sort of like, ‘huh?’”

Increased funding and awareness-building efforts are critical to tackling the gender gap in sports participation. This study showed that more work needs to be done to educate sports leaders and the public about the scope of this problem.

Recommendations for Retaining Girls in Sports and Physical Activity

This section offers recommendations that would increase participation and retention. Specifically, the qualitative data suggests that in addition to gender-sensitive coaching, girls need options, encouragement, and social time.

One way to help support girls in sports is to **build a pipeline of (mostly women) coaches who have a gender-sensitive approach** to their work with girls (and boys). While many focus group participants did not express a clear preference for male or female coaches, their concerns about sexism and other gender-specific barriers indicate that they would benefit from having coaches who can understand and address the unique challenges that girls face in sports.

Girls’ preferences in terms of their coach’s gender were also shaped by other forms of intersecting identity. For example, in some cases, religious background influenced girls’ preference for women coaches. As one girl stated:

“[My coach] is an assistant coach, so she helps out if [the head coach] is absent, if he goes to talk to other coaches. I prefer her because I feel like she can teach me more. I wear a scarf, too, so she can — I play basketball, and you need your hand placed on the ball specifically, and I feel comfortable with her touching me and stuff like that.”

Focus group participants also expressed a desire for **more options for sports and physical activity** that address their specific needs and interests. When asked about what other types of programs would motivate girls their age to stay active, there was sometimes a moment of silence in the focus groups as participants pondered what they might like to see.

Girls reported interest in trying a range of different sports and physical activities or continuing to play but in modified leagues. For example, girls in three groups mentioned wanting to try football. Some had played before and enjoyed it but were no

longer doing it, while others just wanted to try it, either in a girls-only space or with boys.

A regional program leader in WNY described trying to convince her organization, considered a local leader in the field, to create some girl-specific spaces in their monthly open-gym, sports-sampling programming:

“I made a petition: Can we do a girls-only [sports sampling] Saturday once a month? Like anywhere? ... Can I have one school [of the 25 schools in the program] in each of the [5] zones [for a girls-only gym day]? And [program leadership] were like, ‘Well, we think it’d better if we just push it on to once a month in the whole city. And I was like, ‘No, because you’re you like you need a series, you have to build that momentum. You have so many factors that are going against. ... No one wants to invest in root beer. Like, there’s this difficulty asking to have the time knowing I’m going to ask for the gym for an hour [for girls only]. And I know if I open up to the guys, I’ll have 30 guys in here. If I don’t go up to the girls [and intentionally recruit them] on this first Saturday, I might have six. Yeah, no one’s signing off for that, but because you don’t give them that space, you never build to week six, where you could have the 30 [girls], right?’”

In addition to specific sports, several focus group participants mentioned wanting more opportunities to talk about sports-related issues that affected them, including physical and mental health, nutrition, and body image. In one focus group with high schoolers in WNY, answers included:

Interviewer: If there are programs that want to help girls be more active, what should they do?

Participant 1: [Talk about] body image, positive body image. Because if you see the sports magazines and stuff, the girls are super skinny. Younger me, I would’ve been like, “Ah, hell no; I’m never gonna be like that.”

Participant 2: If there was a before-school yoga program that they could do or something.

Girls also said they wanted to get outside more and would like to see programs where they could engage with their friends so they could be active and social at the same time.

Almost every group discussed the need for more consistent and widespread encouragement when it came to sports. When asked who specifically they wanted more encouragement from, girls expressed needing it from all sides — from coaches, teachers, parents, and peers. One middle schooler in SEMI said:

“Not enough encouragements because it’s already not a lot of girl sports that are available. We try one, and [if] you’re not good at it, and no one’s encouraging you to keep going or saying, ‘Maybe you just didn’t try the right sport. Try a different one.’ It just pushes them outta the sport instead of getting them into a different one that might work better for them.”

Many focus group participants also expressed a desire for more constructive support from their male peers. One middle schooler in WNY explained, *“Everybody. Includin’ the boys. ‘Cause boys just be doin’ — they be sittin’ like this (crosses arms). When it comes to boys playin’ basketball, that’s when [everybody] cheers for the boys, but no one do it for the girls.”*

From their parents, girls wanted encouragement, without undue pressure. Girls whose parents were not present or supportive wanted them to be more engaged, while those whose parents were very involved wanted them to take a step back. As one sixth grader from WNY put it, *“We want them to embarrass us, but not too much.”* Girls also wanted parents to help them overcome the uncomfortable and frustrating parts of sports and encourage them to persevere. One middle school cheerleader in WNY talked about wanting her mother’s encouragement when she felt reluctant to go to practice:

“I want my mom to make me go to practice more ... like driving me to practice. Sometimes, I don’t feel like it, [but] I would still wanna go to the practice because, if I [don’t] go to the practice I’ll [not] only [be] disappointed because I like that sport, but also disappointed [because] ... if I wanna go to the competition and participate, I can’t because I missed what we were supposed to do for the competition and for the performance. Now, I can’t do it, and I don’t know any steps.”

The widespread lack of awareness or general ambivalence towards improving girls’ participation and retention in sports means that the issue needs to be addressed in multiple ways to catalyze change. A variety of factors influence girls’ access, engagement, and retention in sports, but there are limitations to what can be addressed programmatically in the short- and medium-term. For example, the limited number of sports facilities and lack of acceptable public transportation are both major barriers to access and engagement in sports. These challenges are ultimately infrastructure issues that will require more global solutions.

Recommendations for Recruiting and Retaining Women in Coaching

While interviewees highlighted multiple challenges in recruiting women into coaching roles, they also shared several promising approaches to cultivating women as coaches, including creative ways of offering mentoring to new coaches and engaging former players as coaches.

One program leader described her approach when starting a new volleyball league at a YMCA in SEMI. Two mothers of players were interested in coaching but didn’t have a background in volleyball or coaching. The program leader paired each of the new coaches with experienced coaches to provide mentorship. The teams held practices at the same time on separate halves of the gym and ran some drills together, giving the new coaches an opportunity to learn from the experienced coaches. The program leader explained:

“The only way to learn to coach the game of volleyball is to actually do it and be able to ask questions with that other coach, and that’s how it was in there. ... So we definitely do try to keep working together and combine and never leave anybody just thrown to the sharks by themselves.”

Several program leaders discussed their efforts to encourage former participants to become coaches. One high school volleyball coach talked about engaging her current high school players while doing outreach at local middle schools. This not only helps give the high school players a leadership opportunity, but also is effective at recruiting girls from local middle schools, as they have these cool role models who are just a few years older coming to talk to them about playing volleyball. This same coach also said that almost all the coaches for her JV and freshman volleyball teams are her former players, and they serve as important role models for the players. Girls on the Run and Figure Skating in Detroit have also engaged with former program participants as coaches and mentors for girls currently in their programs.

Appendix B: Regional Survey, Female Teens and Adults

Background & Objectives

The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) has been working with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to advance sport among girls in Western New York and Southeast Michigan. The current goal is to understand more about sport drop-out and the lack of female coaches in youth sports, in order to determine how to remedy this in coming years.

Audiences

- Girls ages 12–17, of varying sport status (currently play, past played, never played). A mix of age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors will be collected.
- To determine micro-level barriers to play/continuing to play and how to encourage girls to continue playing sports
- Adult females 18–64: Coaches, those who have expressed interest in coaching, and those who have dropped out of coaching. Current coaches will be non-school coaches of ages 8–14.
- To determine micro-level barriers to coaching and how to attract more females to youth sports coaching

Approach

In order to reach these targeted audiences, we will employ the YouGov Panel, as well as partner panels. We also have the option of creating a shareable link to the survey that may be passed along to coaches.

Length of Survey

~12 Minutes (TBD points)

Deliverables

- U.S. Teen Sample of $n=240$ total girls in SEMI, $n=150$ total girls in WNY
- Assuming a breakdown of roughly: 40% current sports participants, 60% past/never sports participants
- U.S. Female adult sample, in total $n=60$
 - $n=20$ Coaches
 - $n=20$ Interested in coaching
 - $n=20$ Youth Sports Coaching Dropouts

Parent Screener

To start, we have a few background questions.

S1a. Zip Code

CLASSIFY INTO STATE (TERMINATE IF NOT NY OR MI)

CLASSIFY INTO COUNTY (TERMINATE IF NY AND NOT 1–6 AT S1; TERMINATE IF MI AND NOT 1–7 AT S2)

S1. ONLY TO WNY RESPONDENTS: The counties included in the Western New York region are: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming counties.

Which of these counties do you live in? Please select one:

- <1> Allegany
- <2> Cattaraugus
- <3> Chautauqua
- <4> Erie
- <5> Genesee
- <6> Niagara
- <7> Orleans
- <8> Wyoming
- <9> None of these [TERMINATE]

S2. ONLY TO MI RESPONDENTS: The counties included in the Michigan region are Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties

Which of these counties do you live in? Please select one:

- <1> Livingston
- <2> Macomb
- <3> Monroe
- <4> Oakland
- <5> St. Claire
- <6> Washtenaw
- <7> Wayne
- <8> None of these [TERMINATE]

S3. How would you describe the place where you live? Please select one:

- <1> City
- <2> Suburb
- <3> Town
- <4> Rural area
- <5> Other {*OPEN PROMPT*="Please specify"}

S4. Age

TERMINATE IF NOT 18–64

S5. Gender

S6. Please indicate the racial or ethnic groups that best describe you. Please select all that apply

- <1> White
- <2> Black or African American
- <3> Hispanic or Latino
- <4> Asian or Asian American
- <5> Native American
- <6> Middle Eastern
- <7> Other
- <8> Don't know
- <9> None of these

ASK S7 IF FEMALE (S5/PDL GENDER4 = WOMAN, R2)

S7. In the past **ten years**, which, if any, of the following activities have you engaged in? Please select all that apply. *RANDOMIZE*

- <1> Park, street or community cleanup
- <2> Coaching a local youth sports team
- <3> Volunteer for local political campaigns/organizations
- <4> Serving on a school or community board or committee
- <5> Volunteering at a local food bank or soup kitchen
- <6> None of these [*EXCLUSIVE*]

ASK S8 IF FEMALE (S5/PDL GENDER4 = WOMAN, R2)

S8. If you didn't have any limitations or time constraints, in which types of community activities would you be interested in participating? Please select all that apply. *RANDOMIZE*

- <1> Park, street, or community cleanup
- <2> Coaching a local youth sports team
- <3> Volunteer for local political campaigns/organizations
- <4> Serving on a school or community board or committee
- <5> Volunteering at a local food bank or soup kitchen
- <6> None of these [*EXCLUSIVE*]

Coaching Youth Sports Section

ASK IF S7=2

S9. You mentioned that you have coached a local youth sports team in the past ten years. Are you currently coaching a sport for youth? Recognizing that many sports are only played at specific times of the year, please say yes if you have coached a full season in the last year, even if the sport is not currently "in season." Please select all that apply. *RANDOMIZE*

- <1> Yes, I currently coach
- <2> No, I have not coached within the past year

ASK IF S8=2

S9A. You mentioned that you would be interested in coaching a local youth sports team. How interested are you in coaching youth sports?

- <1> Very interested
- <2> Somewhat interested
- <3> A little bit interested

HIDDEN MULTI VARIABLE: COACH STATUS

1. *COACH: S9=1*
2. *DROP OUT: S9=2*
3. *INTERESTED: S9a=1 OR 2*
4. *NOT QUALIFIED: NONE OF 1, 2 OR 3 AT COACH STATUS*

Demographics of Children in Household

S10. Are you the parent or guardian of any children under the age of 18? Please select one:

- <1> Yes
- <2> No [*TERMINATE IF COACH STATUS=4*]

ASK IF YES S10=1

S11. How many children do you have in each of the following age groups? Please enter a whole number in each space.

<1> 0–5: __

<2> 6–11: __

<3> 12–17: ____ [TERMINATE IF COACH STATUS=4]

S12. For each child **aged 12–17**, please fill out each field. We are only asking for your child’s name to make asking you questions about that specific child easier. Feel free to use a nickname or first initial only.

All information provided remains anonymous and any information regarding your child will never be associated with the name you provide.

SHOW AS MANY ROWS AS CHILDREN ENTERED IN S11=R3 (AGED 12–17), MAX OF 5 ROWS TO BE SHOWN. IF MORE THAN 5 AT S11 R3, SHOW ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION: Please enter information for your 5 oldest children.

Child Name or First Initial	Age	Child Gender	Hispanic	Race (select all that apply)
	Dropdown: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	<1> Boy <2> Girl <3> Other	Yes No	<1> White <2> Black or African American <3> American Indian or Alaska Native <4> Asian <5> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander <6> Other

DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR CHILD SURVEY IF NO FEMALE CHILD AGES 12–17 AND COACH STATUS =4, SKIP S1A AND S1B IF ONLY BOY CHILDREN

CODE EACH CHILD INTO SINGLE PUNCH RACE VARIABLE CALLED “CRACE_CODED”: priorities are Hispanic, Black, White, other.

<1> Hispanic (Hispanic=1)

<2> Black (Race=2)

<3> White (Race=1)

<4> Other (Race=3, 4, 5 or 6)

S1a. Which activities have the children listed below participated in during their lifetime? Please select all that apply.

COLUMNS

INSERT 1 COLUMN FOR EACH CHILD 12–17 INSERT TEXT: NAME

(IF NO NAME PROVIDED, INSERT “GENDER CHILD AGE X” (ex. “Female Child Age 10”)

ROWS RANDOMIZE KEEP ITEMS 1, 2 AND 3 TOGETHER

<1> Music

<2> Acting/singing/performing arts

<3> Dance

<4> Girl/Boy Scouts

<5> Community service activities

<6> Religious education

<7> Afterschool academic tutoring or enrichment

<8> Art/drawing lessons

<9> School clubs (school government, chess club)

<10> Sports/athletic activities

<98> None of these [EXCLUSIVE]

Current Activities of Children in Household

S1b. And in which activities has *[INSERT CHILD]* participated in within the past year? Please select all that apply.

ROWS RANDOMIZE KEEP ITEMS 1, 2 AND 3 TOGETHER—ONLY SHOW ITEMS SELECTED AT S1a AND REPEAT FOR EACH CHILD

- <1> Music
- <2> Acting/singing/performing arts
- <3> Dance
- <4> Girl/Boy Scouts
- <5> Community service activities
- <6> Religious education
- <7> Afterschool academic tutoring or enrichment
- <8> Art/drawing lessons
- <9> School clubs (school government, chess club)
- <10> Sports/athletic activities
- <98> None of these *[EXCLUSIVE]*

BASE: ALL CHILDREN CURRENTLY PLAYING SPORTS (S1b=10)

S2a. Are the sports or athletic activities that *[PIPE IF ONE CHILD TO BE SHOWN BELOW: this child has participated / PIPE IF 2+CHILDREN TO BE SHOWN BELOW: these children have participated]* in within the past year organized, or are they informal sports or athletic activities?

COLUMNS

INSERT 1 COLUMN FOR EACH CHILD 12-17 THAT PARTICIPATES IN SPORTS (S1B, R10)

ROWS *[RANDOMIZE]* *[SINGLE SELECT IN EACH COLUMN]*

- <1> **Organized:** There is a coach, program leader or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions
- <2> **Informal:** Pick up, at the playground, or in PE/gym class
- <3> Participates in **both** organized and informal sports/athletic activities

BASE: ALL CHILDREN PLAYING SPORTS IN THE PAST (S1A=10 AND S1B≠10)

S2b. Were the sports or athletic activities that *[PIPE IF ONE CHILD TO BE SHOWN BELOW: this child participated in / PIPE IF 2+CHILDREN TO BE SHOWN BELOW: these children participated]* in, organized or were they informal sports or athletic activities?

COLUMNS

INSERT 1 COLUMN FOR EACH CHILD 12-17 THAT PARTICIPATES IN SPORTS (S1B, R10)

ROWS *[RANDOMIZE]* *[SINGLE SELECT IN EACH COLUMN]*

<1> **Organized:** There is a coach, program leader or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions

<2> **Informal:** Pick up, at the playground, or in PE/gym class

<3> Participated in **both** organized and informal sports/athletic activities

VARIABLE TO DETERMINE ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS (CURRENT/ PAST/NEVER)

MARK EACH CHILD AS:

1. CURRENT ORGANIZED SPORTS: S2A=1 OR 3
2. PAST ORGANIZED SPORTS AND NOT CURRENT: S2B=1 OR 3
3. NEVER ORGANIZED SPORTS: S1A<>10 OR S2B=2

VARIABLE TO SELECT CHILD

CHILD SELECTED HERE, BASED ON OPEN QUOTAS FOR AGE, ETHNICITY AND SPORT STATUS.

PIPING TEXT FOR ASSIGNED CHILD

[INSERT CHILD] = CHILD NAME

[INSERT SELECTED CHILD AGE/GENDER (daughter)] = CHILD AGE year old daughter

FINAL CLASSIFICATION:

1. COACH SURVEY= COACH_ STATUS =1, 2 OR 3
2. CHILD SURVEY= QUALIFYING CHILD SELECTED [A QUALIFYING CHILD MUST BE FEMALE (CGENDER=2) AND CAN BE ANY SPORT STATUS

TERMINATE IF NOT CLASSIFIED AS EITHER COACH (R1) OR CHILD (R2)

Coaching, Training and Sports History Section

DISPLAY TO ALL WHO QUALIFY AS CHILD PARTICIPANT (HAVE CHILD SELECTED):

Thank you for answering our preliminary questions. *[IF CHILD PARTICIPANT: For this survey, we'd like to hear from / IF COACH_ STATUS=1, 2 OR 3: both you and your child / IF COACH STATUS=4: your child.]*

[IF YG PANEL ONLY:] In appreciation for participation, you will receive *[IF COACH AND CHILD: 1,000 / IF COACH ONLY OR CHILD ONLY: 500]* points upon completion. *[IF CHILD (Final Classification =2):]* If you have more than one child in the qualifying age range, we will randomly select a child to participate. Only this child should participate in the children's section, and they do not need to be available immediately upon completion of your section of the survey. The *[IF COACH AND CHILD: combined]* survey should take about *[IF COACH AND CHILD: 10 / IF COACH ONLY OR CHILD ONLY: 5-7]* more minutes to complete.

IF COACH SURVEY AND CHILD SURVEY

(FINALCLASSIFICATION=1 AND 2): We are going to start with a few questions about your experiences coaching.

SPLIT ONTO 2 SCREENS HERE, NEXT SECTION ONLY SHOWN IF CHILD SURVEY (FINAL SURVEY=2), SHOWN AFTER COACH QUESTIONS.

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1,2 or 3

A1. Regardless of whether you have coached in the past or are currently coaching or have not coached before, how likely are you to coach a sport in the next 12 months? Please select one:

- <1> Very likely
- <2> Somewhat likely
- <3> Not very likely
- <4> Not at all likely

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 2 [PAST COACHES ONLY]

A1a. When was the last time you coached for at least 3 months, or a full season of a sport? Please select one:

- <1> Less than 2 years ago
- <2> 2–3 years ago
- <3> 4–5 years ago
- <4> More than 5 years ago

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1,2 or 3

A2. Did you play sports at any of the following levels? Please select all that apply.

- <1> Youth
- <2> High school
- <3> College sports
- <4> Professional
- <5> None of the above *[EXCLUSIVE]*

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 OR [COACH STATUS=2 AND A1A=1-3 (P5Y COACH)]

A3. Thinking about your coaching experience in the past **five years**, how frequently were you coaching as a volunteer and how frequently were you working as a paid coach? Please select one:

- <1> All of the time, I coached as a volunteer
- <2> Most of the time, I coached as a volunteer
- <3> About half volunteer, half paid coaching

<4> Most of the time, I was paid as a coach

<5> All of the time, I was paid as a coach

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 OR [COACH STATUS=2 AND A1A=1-3 (P5Y COACH)]

A4. Thinking about your coaching experience in the past **five years**, how frequently were you coaching teams that included your own children? Please select one:

- <1> All of the time
- <2> Some of the time
- <3> A little bit of the time
- <4> None of the time

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 OR [COACH STATUS=2 AND A1A=1-3 (P5Y COACH)], SHOW A5 AND A6 ON SAME SCREEN

A5. Teams are often organized by gender and age. These questions are about the gender makeup of the teams you coach or have coached and about the ages you coach or have coached.

Have the teams you have coached in the past five years included girls, boys or both? Please select all that apply to your coaching experience in the past **five years**. *RANDOMIZE 1 AND 2*

- <1> Girls-only
- <2> Boys-only
- <3> Mixed gender

A6. Thinking about the past **five years**, which age group(s) most closely correspond to the ages of those you have coached? Please select all that apply.

- <1> Under age 5
- <2> Age 5–8
- <3> Age 9–12
- <4> Age 13–14
- <5> Age 15–17

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 or 2

A7. Are you currently, or were you in your most recent coaching role, an assistant coach, a head coach, or something else? Please select all that apply if you are coaching more than one sport and have more than one role.

- <1> Assistant Coach
- <2> Head Coach
- <3> Something Else

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 OR 2

We are going to show you several screens with a different statement on each.

Please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement. Once you select a response, the survey will move to the next question.

A8: DYNAMIC GRID

COLUMNS:

- <1> Strongly Agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Disagree
- <4> Strongly Disagree

ROWS: RANDOMIZE

- <1> I enjoy coaching sports because it gives me the opportunity to mentor younger people.
- <2> I enjoy coaching because I have a passion for sports, and it keeps me involved.
- <3> I like coaching because it gives me valuable time with my own kids.
- <4> I coach so I can get to know other parents in the community.
- <5> I coach so I can feel connected to my community.
- <6> Coaching builds my own self confidence.
- <7> Being a coach is an important to my sense of who I am.
- <8> Coaching helps me be a role model in sport.
- <9> Coaching helps me remain physically active.
- <10> Coaching helps me contribute to my community.
- <11> I like watching young people grow and learn when I coach them.
- <12> I feel recognized by my community for my coaching.

ASK IF A1= 3 OR 4

A9. Why are you not likely to coach in the next 12 months? Please select all that apply and if there are other reasons not mentioned here, please also include them below: *RANDOMIZE*

- <1> I don't have time or I'm too busy.
- <2> I don't see myself as a coach.
- <3> I don't have a child who plays at a level I can coach
- <4> I don't know how to coach.
- <5> I don't feel confident with my coaching skills.
- <6> I don't have enough training in coaching.

<7> I feel self-conscious, that others might judge me.

<8> I'm not very skilled at sports.

<9> I don't like the pressure to win.

<10> I have too many other responsibilities.

<11> When I coach, I have to buy equipment for myself or others that I cannot afford.

<12> Some other reason(s), please describe: *[SPECIFY]*

ASK IF COACH STATUS =1 OR 2 AND A1=3 OR 4

A10. You said you have coached before or are coaching now but you are not likely to coach again in the next 12 months. What might help make it more likely that you would coach in the next 12 months? Please select all that apply. *RANDOMIZE*

- <1> If coaching were paid/or paid better
- <2> If I had more time
- <3> If coaching was less stressful
- <4> If I felt more respected as a coach by my community
- <5> If team parents were more respectful
- <6> If there were more female coaches
- <7> If there was an assistant or co-coach to share some of the responsibilities
- <8> If I felt that I were more skilled at the sport itself
- <9> If I had more advice or guidance on how to coach
- <10> If childcare were provided
- <11> Some other reason(s), please describe: *[SPECIFY]*

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 OR 2

The following question is a list of negative events that may have happened to you while coaching. We are going to show you several screens with a different statement on each.

Please indicate how often each happened. Once you select a response, the survey will move to the next question.

A11. DYNAMIC GRID

COLUMNS:

- <1> Never
- <2> Rarely
- <3> Sometimes
- <4> Often

ROWS: RANDOMIZE

- <1> I felt overwhelmed by the demands of coaching
- <2> I was uncomfortable with how the parents interacted with me or the players
- <3> Parents gave too much direction
- <4> I didn't feel supported
- <5> I felt isolated
- <6> It was very hard to navigate conflict among players
- <7> It was very hard to manage the emotional and mental health issues of players

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1,2 or 3

We are going to show you several screens with a different statement on each.

Please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement. Once you select a response, the survey will move to the next question.

A12. DYNAMIC GRID

COLUMNS:

- <1> Strongly Agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Disagree
- <4> Strongly Disagree
- <5> N/A [ONLY SHOW FOR R2]

ROWS: RANDOMIZE

- <1> Girls in sports have unique needs
- <2> It is harder to coach girls than boys
- <3> There are not enough women coaches of girls' sports
- <4> Men do not show enough respect for women coaches
- <5> Women coaches have a harder time than men coaches do
- <6> Girls are less interested in competition than boys
- <7> Mental health needs of young people make coaching too complex

ASK IF COACH STATUS=1 OR 2

A13. Thinking about your entire lifetime coaching, how much training or support did you receive in how to coach? Please select one:

- <1> None at all
- <2> Less than 5 hours of training

- <3> 5–10 hours of training
- <4> 11–20 hours of training
- <5> 21–40 hours of training
- <6> More than 40 hours of training

ASK IF A13=2–6

A14. How recently did you receive training or support around your coaching? Please select one:

- <1> Less than one year ago
- <2> 1–2 years ago
- <3> 3–5 years ago
- <4> More than 5 years ago

ASK IF A13=2–6

A15. What types of groups have you received training or materials from? Please select all that apply:

- <1> Local
- <2> National
- <3> Other, please specify: [SPECIFY]

ASK IF A13=2–6

A16. Was the training you participated in offered to you or did you seek it out on your own? Please select all that apply.

- <1> Training was offered to me
- <2> I sought out training on my own

ASK IF A13=2–6

A17. Have you ever received training or information about how to coach girls specifically or how to do gender sensitive coaching? Please select one:

- <1> Yes
- <2> No
- <3> Not sure

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1,2 or 3

A18. If you were offered free training on coaching girls specifically or in gender sensitive coaching, how likely would you be to attend such a training?

- <1> Very likely
- <2> Somewhat likely
- <3> A little bit likely
- <4> Not at all likely

A19. What would make you more likely to coach youth sports? Please type your response in the box below, being as detailed as possible. *[OPEN END TEXT]*

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1,2 or 3

A20. What do you need that might help you address the unique needs of girls in sport? Please type your response in the box below, being as detailed as possible. *[OPEN END TEXT]*

Coach Demographics Section

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1, 2 or 3

AD1. We just have a few more questions for you *[IF FINAL CLASSIFICATION=2: before you pass the survey to your child]*. Please remember none of your answers will ever be connected directly with you.

The next set of questions are about gender. The first question is about gender identity. Gender identity is how you categorize yourself as a man, a woman or something else. Gender expression is different from gender identity because it is about how you express yourself on the outside to other people.

How would you describe your gender identity?
Please select one:

- <1> Woman
- <2> Man
- <3> Nonbinary
- <4> Some other gender identity *[SPECIFY]*
- <5> Prefer not to answer

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1, 2 or 3

SHOW AD2 AND AD3 ON THE SAME SCREEN, RANDOMIZE ORDER

This question is about gender expression, how you would describe your appearance, style and how you dress. Please answer both parts.

AD2. I would describe my appearance, style, and how I dress as ...

Not at all feminine					Very feminine
1	2	3	4	5	

<9> I don't understand this question

<10> Prefer not to answer

AD3. I would describe my appearance, style, and how I dress as ...

Not at all masculine					Very masculine
1	2	3	4	5	

<9> I don't understand this question

<10> Prefer not to answer

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1, 2 or 3

AD4. Do you identify as a person living with a physical disability? Please select one:

- <1> Yes
- <2> No
- <3> Not Sure
- <10> Prefer not to answer

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1, 2 or 3

AD5. Which of the following income categories best describes your total annual household income before taxes? Please include income from all sources, such as salary, bonuses, profits, capital gains, stock or investment dividends, rentals, interest, social security, pensions, etc. Please select one:

- <1> Under \$25,000
- <2> \$25,000–\$49,999
- <3> \$50,000–\$74,999
- <4> \$75,000–\$99,999
- <5> \$100,000–\$124,999
- <6> \$125,000–\$149,999
- <7> \$150,000–\$174,999
- <8> \$175,000–\$199,999
- <9> \$200,000–\$249,999
- <10> \$250,000 or more
- <11> Prefer not to answer

ASK IF COACH STATUS= 1, 2 or 3

AD6. Which of the following best describes your sexuality?

1. Heterosexual / straight
2. Lesbian / gay woman
3. Gay man
4. Bisexual
5. Other
6. Prefer not to say

Child Handoff

DISPLAY 1 (SCREEN 2) CHILD SURVEYS ONLY

Thank you for taking the time to complete your portion of this survey.

We have selected [INSERT SELECTED CHILD AGE/GENDER (DAUGHTER)], [INSERT CHILD] to take the survey.

While we have requested your child's name/nickname/ first initial so we can personalize the survey questions, this information will never be revealed to any third parties.

Please note that answering one or more questions in this survey will result in YouGov collecting categories of data that may be regarded as "sensitive," for example information about health, race, or religion. We need parental consent to collect this information, so it is important that you understand that this information will be collected if your child participates.

While we need your permission for your child to take part, your child must also be willing to participate. Over the next few pages, we have provided some information that explains everything your child needs to know about taking part in a survey, including the information we'll be asking them to provide, and what we'll use it for. More information about how we collect and use personal data is available in our research privacy notice: <https://account.yougov.com/us-en/account/privacy-policy>.

Click the button below to continue.

DISPLAY2b. The survey questions ask about participation in extracurricular activities, including sports. Do you consent to your child participating in this survey?

<1> Yes

<2> No (I understand selecting this option will end the survey and I will not receive the full points) *[TERMINATE IF FINAL_ CLASSIFICATION=1, IF FINAL_ CLASSIFICATION=1, MARK AS COMPLETE AND GRANT 500 POINTS]*

SHOW IF DISPLAY2b=1

DISPLAY2c. Is [INSERT CHILD] currently available to take the survey?

<1> Yes, my child is available to take the survey now

<2> No, but they will be available at a later time

SHOW IF DISPLAY2c=1

DISPLAY3. Great! Please have [INSERT CHILD] begin taking the survey, click button below to continue.

SHOW IF DISPLAY2c=2

DISPLAY4. You said that your child is not available at the moment. Please have [INSERT CHILD] take the survey as soon as possible. When your child is ready to take their portion of the survey, simply click on the link provided in the email sent to you. We highly recommend they use the same computer or device you used to complete your portion of the survey.

Remember, you cannot receive the *[IF YG PANEL: [IF COACH AND CHILD AT FINAL CLASSIFICATION: 1,000 points/ IF COACH ONLY OR CHILD ONLY AT FINAL CLASSIFICATION: 500 points] [IF EXTERNAL PANEL: reward]* for your participation unless you and your child both complete the survey!]

Parent to Child Handover Text

DISPLAY TO ALL:

We need your child's consent to take part in this survey — please ensure your child reads this information before continuing to the next page.

PLEASE HAND THE DEVICE TO YOUR CHILD NOW.

Hi there! We are YouGov, a market research company that operates in many countries around the world. We are running a survey on sports activities — and we need your help!

Market research is a way of finding out about what people think and feel about a huge range of topics, and surveys are a common and effective way of gathering this information. If you choose to participate in our survey, we will ask you a bunch of questions and will then combine your answers with the answers that other people have given to create interesting and valuable information for our customers.

For example, if we were doing some research for an ice cream maker that wants to create a new ice cream flavor, we might ask you about your favorite ice cream flavors, and maybe even what your ultimate ice cream would be. By combining your answers with those given by others, we can give the ice cream maker information (e.g., 72% of people said that chocolate is their favorite flavor) that might help them decide what flavor they should make next.

We take your privacy very seriously, so if you choose to take part, we will keep the information you give us secure and will not reveal your identity to our customers.

We hope that you'll help us by taking part in our survey. If you'd like to take part, please click on the arrow button below. Remember that if you need help at any point, you can always ask a parent/guardian who is with you.

Click the button below to continue.

Child Sports Section

Thank you for answering some questions for us today. We want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will ask you, and that no one will be linking your answers to who you are. We are interested in the different opinions of people your age, so please give us honest answers.

C1. What grade are you in now?

- <1> 5th or lower
- <2> 6th
- <3> 7th
- <4> 8th
- <5> 9th
- <6> 10th
- <7> 11th
- <8> 12th
- <9> In college or university
- <10> In school but ungraded or alternative system of grades
- <11> Not in school

We are going to show you several screens with a different statement on each. For each of the following statements, please select strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree and the survey will move to the next question.

C2: [DYNAMIC GRID]

COLUMNS:

- <1> Strongly Agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither Agree nor Disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly Disagree

ROWS: RANDOMIZE

- <1> I would describe myself as an athlete
- <2> Being an athlete is an important part of who I am
- <3> Other people would describe me as an athlete
- <4> I am strongly committed to being an athlete
- <5> I enjoy competition
- <6> The experience of competing allows me to discover my potential
- <7> I compete with others even when they are not competing with me
- <8> I find myself turning a friendly game or activity into a serious contest

C3. Thinking about playing sports, whether you have done so or not, do you prefer to play on teams that include boys?
RANDOMIZE ORDER — SHOW EITHER 1–3 OR 3–1.

- <1> I'd rather play on teams that include boys
- <2> It doesn't matter to me whether the team includes boys or not
- <3> I'd rather play on teams that do not include boys

C4. Thinking about the past five years, how often have the following occurred?

COLUMNS:

- <1> Never
- <2> Rarely
- <3> Sometimes
- <4> Often

ROWS: RANDOMIZE

- <1> Parades, pep rallies or other community or school celebrations of **boys' sports** (only)
- <2> Parades, pep rallies or other community or school celebrations of **girls' sports** (only)
- <3> Parades, pep rallies or other community or school celebrations of **both boys' and girls' sports**

C5. When we reference playing sports, we are interested in whether you have played or taken part in a complete season (for those sports that have seasons) or three consecutive months where you practiced or played at least once per week on average (for sports that do not have seasons). We are also referencing organized sports, where there is a coach, program leader or instructor and there are regularly scheduled practices, training sessions or competitions.

Your parent/guardian has told us that you *[ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS=1/have played sport(s) in the past year]* *[ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS=2/have played sport(s) in the past]* *[ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS=3/ have never played sports]*.

Is this correct?

<1> Yes

<2> No

ASK IF C5=2

C6. Which of the following best describes you?

<1> I have played at least one sport in the past year *[HIDE IF ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS=1]*

<2> I have played sport(s) in the past *[HIDE IF ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS=2]*

<3> I have never played any sports *[HIDE IF ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS=3]*

FINAL_ ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS_ C:

*IF C5=1, MARK BASED ON FINAL_ ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS.
IF C5=2, MARK BASED ON RESPONSE AT C6. PUNCH CODES
DIRECTLY CORRESPOND – I.E. R1 AT C6 =R1 HERE.*

1. *CURRENT ORGANIZED SPORTS:*
2. *PAST ORGANIZED SPORTS AND NOT CURRENT:*
3. *NEVER ORGANIZED SPORTS:*

ASK IF FINAL_ ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS_ C=1 OR 2

C7. Which **organized** sports have you ever participated in? Please select all that apply.

<1> Archery

<2> Baseball / Softball

<3> Basketball

<4> Cheerleading

<5> Crew

<6> Equestrian

<7> Field hockey

<8> Football

<9> Golf

<10> Gymnastics

<11> Ice hockey

<12> Ice skating

<13> Lacrosse

<14> Martial arts (karate, taekwondo, etc.)

<15> Rugby

<16> Soccer

<17> Swimming / Diving

<18> Tennis

<19> Track and field / Cross country

<20> Volleyball

<21> Water polo

<22> Weightlifting

<23> Wrestling

<99> Other, please specify: *[SPECIFY]*

ASK IF CHILD CURRENTLY PARTICIPATES IN ORGANIZED SPORTS [FINAL_ ALL_ SPORTS_ STATUS_ C=1]

C8. And which **organized** sports have you participated in within the past year?

ONLY SHOW RESPONSES SELECTED AT P3

<1> Archery

<2> Baseball / Softball

<3> Basketball

<4> Cheerleading

<5> Crew

<6> Equestrian

<7> Field hockey

<8> Football

<9> Golf

<10> Gymnastics

<11> Ice hockey

<12> Ice skating

<13> Lacrosse

<14> Martial arts (karate, taekwondo, etc.)

<15> Rugby

<16> Soccer
 <17> Swimming / Diving
 <18> Tennis
 <19> Track and field / Cross country
 <20> Volleyball
 <21> Water polo
 <22> Weightlifting
 <23> Wrestling
 <99> Other, please specify: *[SPECIFY]*

*ASK C9 ONLY IF MORE THAN ONE CURRENT SPORT ACTIVITIES
 SELECTED AT C8*

C9. And, which organized sport would you consider your
primary sport?

SINGLE SELECT

INSERT ALL ITEMS AT C8

IF ONLY 1 SPORT AT C8, AUTOPUNCH AND HIDE

SHOW IF FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=2

C10. Which organized sport did you play **most recently**? Please
 select one:

SINGLE SELECT

INSERT ALL ITEMS AT C7

IF ONLY 1 SPORT AT C7, AUTOPUNCH AND HIDE

SHOW IF FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=2

C11. You said that you have played *[C10 RESPONSE]* in the past
 but are not playing currently.

What grade were you in when you **most recently** took part in
 one season or three consecutive months of *[C10 RESPONSE]*?
 Please select one:

*PLEASE ONLY DISPLAY GRADE SELECTED AT C1 AND THOSE
 PREVIOUS (NOTE THAT GRADES AND RESPONSE NUMBERS
 DIFFER — GRADE 10 AT C1 IS R6. ALWAYS SHOW OTHER. IF R10
 OR R11 AT C1, ONLY SHOW OTHER*

<1> Kindergarten
 <2> 1st
 <3> 2nd
 <4> 3rd
 <5> 4th
 <6> 5th

<7> 6th
 <8> 7th
 <9> 8th
 <10> 9th
 <11> 10th
 <12> 11th
 <13> 12th
 <14> In college or university
 <15> Other [specify]

*SHOW FOR CURRENT/PAST PARTICIPANTS: FINAL_ALL_
 SPORTS_STATUS_C=1 OR 2 (CURRENT OR PAST)*

For the next series of questions, we'd like you to think about your
most recent season participating in *[FINAL_PRIMARY_SPORT]*.

*SHOW C12 FOR FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=1 OR 2
 (CURRENT OR PAST)*

C12. Thinking about *[INSERT FINAL_PRIMARY_SPORT]*, did you
 most recently participate through your school, your community
 or some other way? Select all that apply.

<1> School
 <2> Community
 <3> Other, please specify: *[SPECIFY]*

*SHOW C13 FOR FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=1 OR 2
 (CURRENT OR PAST)*

C13. Did you have to try out or compete for a spot on the team
 or was it open to anyone who was interested? Please select one:

<1> I had to compete or try out
 <2> It was open to anyone
 <3> Other, please specify: *[SPECIFY]*

*SHOW C14 FOR FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C = 1 OR 2
 (CURRENT OR PAST)*

C14. Did the team you played on include boys as team
 members? Please select one:

<1> Yes
 <2> No

SHOW C15 ONLY FOR C14=2

C15. How often, if ever, did you practice with boys?
Please select one:

- <1> Never
- <2> Rarely
- <3> Sometimes
- <4> Often
- <5> Always

SHOW C16 FOR FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=1 OR 2
(CURRENT OR PAST)

We are going to show you several screens with a different statement on each. Still thinking about your **most recent** season participating in [FINAL_PRIMARY_SPORT], how often **did** the following occur during the season? Once you select a response, the survey will move to the next question.

C16. DYNAMIC GRID

COLUMNS:

- <1> Never
- <2> Rarely
- <3> Sometimes
- <4> Often
- <5> Always

ROWS: RANDOMIZE

- <1> There were places for us to change that felt safe and private.
- <2> There was enough time to rest during practice.
- <3> There was adequate time and supplies to stay hydrated/ drink water.
- <4> Boys (not including coaches, assistants or boys practicing with the team) watched your team practice
- <5> Boys attended games we played
- <6> Boys teased me
- <7> I saw boys tease other girls on the team
- <8> I felt that the coach(es) understood my specific needs as a girl
- <9> I felt that the coach(es) were supportive of me
- <10> I saw that the coach(es) were supportive of other girls
- <11> The team felt too competitive
- <12> I didn't have clothing or shoes that worked for me for practice or play
- <13> I enjoyed seeing friends while practicing or playing sports

- <14> I enjoyed competition while playing sports
- <15> Playing sports helped me to manage stress

SHOW C17 FOR FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C = 1 OR 2
(CURRENT OR PAST)

C17. Still thinking about your **most recent** season participating in [PRIMARY_SPORT], how much do you agree with the following statement?

I was uncomfortable with the uniforms that were required

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither Agree nor Disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly Disagree
- <9> Uniforms were not required

Child General Sport Section

Now, we'd like you to think about all of your experiences with sports.

SHOW C18 FOR FINAL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=2 OR 3

C18. You indicated that you [IF FINAL_SPORTS_STATUS_C =2: have played sports but] have not played any sports [IF FINAL_SPORTS_STATUS_C =2: in the past year]. How likely do you think it is that you will play a complete season or 3 months consecutively of any sport sometime in the next 12 months?

- <1> Very likely
- <2> Likely
- <3> Unlikely
- <4> Very Unlikely

ASK C19 IF FINAL_ALL_SPORTS_STATUS_C=2

C19. You said that you have not played a sport in the last year. People stop playing sports for a variety of reasons, some of which might not be listed here. Which of the following, if any, were important reasons you stopped playing sports? Please select all that apply to you. [RANDOMIZE]

- <1> The other girls on the team were mean
- <2> The coach was not supportive
- <3> I was injured
- <4> I didn't enjoy the sport
- <5> I wanted to do something else, like a different activity, homework, or time with friends, more than I wanted to do the sport

- <6> The sport was too competitive
- <7> I wasn't good enough at it
- <8> I wasn't having fun
- <9> I was afraid of getting hurt
- <10> Participating made me feel bad about myself
- <11> I had too much schoolwork
- <12> My parents didn't want me to
- <13> I couldn't attend practice regularly
- <14> I needed to do chores at home or take care of younger children at home
- <15> It required too much time
- <16> It was too expensive
- <17> Some other reason, please specify: *[SPECIFY]*

ASK IF ANY ITEMS SELECTED AT C19:

C20. Which of the following was the most important thing that caused you to stop playing sports?

INSERT ALL RESPONSES SELECTED AT C19

IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE SELECTED AT C19, AUTOPUNCH AND HIDE

C21. Are there any sports that you would like to participate in, but that you cannot participate in (for **any reason**, including that they are not offered or they are not financially possible for you)?

- <1> Yes
- <2> No

ASK IF YES (R1) AT C21

C22. Which of the following would you like to participate in, but cannot for any reason? Please select a maximum of three from the list below. *HIDE SPORTS SELECTED AT C8*

- <1> Archery
- <2> Baseball / Softball
- <3> Basketball
- <4> Cheerleading
- <5> Crew
- <6> Equestrian
- <7> Field hockey
- <8> Football
- <9> Golf

- <10> Gymnastics
- <11> Ice hockey
- <12> Ice skating
- <13> Lacrosse
- <14> Martial arts (karate, taekwondo, etc.)
- <15> Rugby
- <16> Soccer
- <17> Swimming / Diving
- <18> Tennis
- <19> Track and field / Cross country
- <20> Volleyball
- <21> Water polo
- <22> Weightlifting
- <23> Wrestling
- <99> Other, please specify: *[SPECIFY]*

C23. Switching topics a bit, is there currently an adult (or more than one adult) who is not your parent and who has had a **significant influence** on you and whom you feel you can **count on in times of need**, such as an adult friend, relative or mentor? You do not need to tell us who that person is, but please select yes (one person), yes (more than one person), or no.

- <1> Yes, one person
- <2> Yes, more than one person
- <3> No

IF C23=1 OR 2 ASK C24

C24. Please think of the most important adult who is not a parent but who has a significant influence on you:

Does that person encourage you to play sports?

- <1> Not at all
- <2> A little bit
- <3> Somewhat
- <4> Very much

C25. Do your parent(s) or guardian(s) encourage you to play sports?

- <1> Not at all
- <2> A little bit
- <3> Somewhat
- <4> Very much

C26. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about why *[FINAL SPORTS STATUS_C =1 you / FINAL SPORTS STATUS_C=2 you used to FINAL SPORTS STATUS_C=3 you don't]* play organized sports?

Child Demographics

CD1. We just have a few more questions. Please remember none of your answers will ever be connected directly with you.

What type of school are you enrolled in?

- <1> Public school (not charter)
- <2> Public charter school
- <3> Private school
- <4> Home schooling
- <5> Other type of school *[SPECIFY]*

CD2. How would you describe your racial and/or ethnic identity? Please check all that apply.

- <1> African American, Afro-Caribbean or Black
- <2> Arab American or Middle Eastern
- <3> Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander
- <4> Latina/o/x or Hispanic
- <5> Native American, American Indian or Indigenous
- <6> White or Caucasian
- <7> I prefer not to answer this question *[EXCLUSIVE]*
- <8> A race/ethnicity not listed here *[SPECIFY]*

CD3. The next set of questions are about gender. The first question is about gender identity. Gender identity is how you categorize yourself as a boy, a girl or something else. Gender expression is different from gender identity because it is about how you express yourself on the outside to other people.

How would you describe your gender identity?

- <1> Girl or female
- <2> Boy or male
- <3> Nonbinary

<4> Some other gender identity *[SPECIFY]*

<5> Prefer not to answer

SHOW CD4, CD5 ON THE SAME SCREEN, RANDOMIZE ORDER

This question is about gender expression, how you would describe your appearance, style and how you dress. Please answer both parts.

CD4. I would describe my appearance, style and how I dress as ...

Not at all feminine					Very feminine
1	2	3	4	5	

<9> I don't understand this question

<10> Prefer not to answer

CD5. I would describe my appearance, style and how I dress as ...

Not at all masculine					Very masculine
1	2	3	4	5	

<9> I don't understand this question

<10> Prefer not to answer

CD6. Do you identify as a person living with a physical disability?

- <1> Yes
- <2> No
- <3> Not Sure
- <10> Prefer not to answer

Child to Parent Handback Text

Thank you very much for taking this survey. You have now finished answering all of the questions so you can **pass your device back** to the parent/guardian who asked you to participate in this survey. Once that parent/guardian has taken control, please click the button below.

CLOSING STATEMENT — DISPLAY TO ALL:

You have now finished answering all of the questions. Thank you very much for taking this survey.

Appendix C: Community-Centric Roadmap for Empowering Women Coaches and Girls in Youth Sports

Introduction

The Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) conducted a three-year research initiative funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation focused on addressing access, engagement, and retention in sports for girls in under-resourced communities as well as the lack of women coaches in the youth sports space. The research initiative included four phases: 1) literature review, 2) qualitative research, 3) quantitative survey research, and 4) strategic planning.

This process led us to develop a strategic roadmap to support replication of this approach in other regions. This document is intended to be a step-by-step guide for regional leaders and community members to conduct a similar participatory process to ensure relevance and responsiveness to girls and women in your area. There are six key phases of this work as outlined in the figure below. These phases are detailed in the table that spans pages 97–101. Supporting documentation and examples for many of these phases can be found on pages 101–108.



Conceptual Model of Community-Driven Hyperlocal Assessment of Sports and Coaching Participation

Dark grey: Core leadership responsibility at each stage to convene and drive the project.

Light grey: Intentional and consistent outreach and engagement of people “on the ground” doing the work. This includes youth in sports, directors, and coaches of sports programming, and women in coaching.

Diamonds: Each phase of the project depends on the work of the preceding phase. Each phase involves work by the core leadership team and engagement with the community.

Strategic Roadmap	How long does this take?	Who is involved?	How are we doing this?
Phase 1: Assess Needs and Assets Using Multiple Data Sources			
1. Create your core leadership team . This should include leaders in youth sports and coaching who work at the regional or community levels and have expertise and/or knowledge of both regional and/or national trends. For example, our leadership team included staff working through Aspen Institute’s Project Play embedded within local community foundations in the two target regions, directors of youth sport programming, and researchers from each region.		Project leader, local community foundations, key leaders/directors in programs, researchers	Online, email communication, phone calls, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)

2.	Determine budget and secure source(s) of funding to support person time, events, data collection/administration and/or analysis and dissemination materials.		Project leader	
3.	Identify and review external sources of information and data that can be used a foundation for your research . You can use free resources like Google Scholar or PubMed, but you may want to partner with a team member who has access to academic databases. In your review, you should also access publicly available secondary data from large surveys. This includes regional and national Youth Risk Behavior Survey data (YRBS), National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), and Aspen Institute Project Play State of Play Annual Reports, among others.	2–4 months	Team member(s) with research or evaluation experience	Web-based searches of literature, access to academic databases
4.	Identify internal sources of data (e.g., program participation rates; post-program evaluations; conversations with youth, families, and staff). This is particularly relevant for those who are conducting this assessment and planning process within a small number of organizations who use similar approaches to program evaluation. For those who are working within a region that includes multiple partners/organizations, you may want to collect this information through surveys and/or focus groups rather than compiling primary data from evaluations (see step 5). Otherwise, there may be additional work required compiling program data in different formats, using different systems, and measuring different outcomes.	2–4 months (can overlap with identifying external sources)	Team member(s) with research or evaluation experience, program directors, youth, family, program staff	Web-based shared folders, use of Excel or other spreadsheet/database to catalogue information collected
5.	If needed, collect primary data (e.g., surveys, focus groups) to fill in gaps in the existing literature. This may be particularly important if there is not published research or data available that includes populations in your community. For this phase, funding permitting, you may opt to partner with a researcher or evaluator to support the development and implementation of surveys and/or focus groups.	3–6 months (should occur after you have identified existing sources of data and literature)	Project leader, team member(s) with research or evaluation experience, outside consultant	Online surveys (e.g., Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, REDCap), audio recording, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)
Phase 2: Synthesize Key Findings and Discuss with Local Stakeholders				
6.	Synthesize Key Findings. Within your core leadership group, compile key points from these data sources into a digestible, plain-language presentation. There may be more than one presentation depending on your target audiences and the complexity of the issue of interest. For example, we opted to create two separate presentations: one focused on girls' participation in sports and one focused on women in coaching.	1–3 months	Project leader, local community foundations, key leaders/directors in programs, researchers	PowerPoint or Google Slides, Online, email communication, phone calls, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)

7.	<p>Check this summary of findings with key informants “on the ground”: Convene a representative group of youth, families, coaches, directors, and other key stakeholders to review and discuss the data. Note: You may opt to hold these meetings as affinity groups (e.g., all youth, all coaches, etc.) or as groups composed of multiple identities/roles. Also, you may opt to hold convenings in specific regions (e.g., rural, urban, or suburban) or more broadly, inclusive of all geographic designations. This is an excellent role for your local community foundation partners. For in-person meetings, consider accessible meeting spaces that are low or no cost or can be contributed “in kind” (e.g., libraries, community centers, institutional and academic partners).</p> <p>See the guidance “Key Informant Meetings/ Focus Group Protocol” on pages 101–102.</p>	3–6 months	Project leader. Team member(s) with research or evaluation experience, youth, families, coaches, directors, and other key stakeholders	PowerPoint or Google Slides, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet), in-person meetings (refreshments provided), hybrid meetings (e.g., one presenter virtual, participants gathered with an onsite facilitator)
8.	<p>Synthesize findings from the key informant meetings. Distill key issues and strategies that were raised by participants into a digestible, plain-language presentation for sharing with the core leadership team.</p>		Team member(s) with research or evaluation experience	PowerPoint or Google Slides

Phase 3: Identify Promising Practices and Prioritize by Community Perception, Potential Impact, and Effort

9.	<p>Within the core leadership group, discuss all findings within the new context of the key informant conversations. What was most important to the folks “on the ground”? What did they think worked well? Where were there gaps? How did they propose to fill those gaps? Compile the key issues, including those that are broadly known and experienced as well as those unique to the region of interest.</p> <p>Create a table with the issues in the first column and potential strategies to address the issue in the second column (See Example Table on pages 103–105). It is useful to categorize the strategies into topic areas for ease of use. These potential strategies should be informed by the key informant conversations, the experience of the core leadership team, and a review of the literature.</p>	1–3 months	Project leader, local community foundations, key leaders/directors in programs, researchers	Online, email communication, phone calls, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)
10.	<p>Review the strategies using an Impact Effort Matrix (page 105). Categorize strategies using this matrix in terms of effort and impact (low- versus high-effort and low- versus high-impact). Compile the strategies in the high-impact categories (both high- and low-effort) and develop open-ended questions to elicit feedback from regional organizations and stakeholders about their use of these strategies.</p>	1–2 weeks	Project leader, local community foundations, key leaders/directors in programs, researchers	Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or other word processing program

Phase 4: Facilitate Local Conversations to Hear from Those Already Implementing Effective Strategies

11.	<p>Reach out to local organizations, sports program directors, coaches, and youth inviting them to a ≤1-hour conversation about strategies that have worked well for them to address the main barriers you identified. For example, we found that "building strong relationships between players and between the players and coaches" was a key strategy for retention. Therefore, we asked, "What strategies have you used to build relationships between the girls in the sport? How do you feel this has helped retain them in the sport?"</p> <p>See the Protocol for Local Conversations on pages 106–107.</p>	2–3 months	Project leader, team member(s) with research or evaluation experience	Virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet), in-person meetings
12.	<p>Compile short vignettes from each of the local conversations that capture the successful way respondents implemented a strategy or tool to address a key regional issue. Share these vignettes with the respondent/organization to ensure accuracy and acceptability.</p>	1–2 months	Team member(s) with research or evaluation experience	Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or other word processing program

Phase 5: Prepare a Report and Share the Findings

13.	<p>Compile a final report of recommendations that align the region's needs and assets. Integrate at least one short vignette from each respondent/organization.</p> <p>Confirm that the person and organization are agreeable to being identified and listed as a resource prior to sharing the findings more broadly.</p> <p>Share the final draft for feedback with the core leadership team.</p> <p>Finalize the document upon receipt of all feedback.</p> <p>Determine best approaches for sharing the report. It should be shared with all organizations who contributed to the project and can be linked to web pages; shared on social media; and sent to local schools, youth-serving organizations, athletic departments, etc.</p>	1–2 months	Team member(s) with research or evaluation experience, participating organizations/ person, project leader, local community foundations, key leaders/directors in programs, researchers	Online, email communication, phone calls, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)
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Phase 6: Build Local Capacity

14.	Encourage and support programs to initially select one or two strategies to implement and evaluate the impact of strategy implementation. This may be quantitative data like participation rates and retention, or it may be qualitative data like youth and family feedback collected through conversations or formal evaluation surveys.	Online, email communication, phone calls, virtual meetings (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet)
15.	Simple approaches like Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles for quality improvement work well for planning and implementing programmatic initiatives, measuring the impact of those initiatives, and pivoting, as needed, in response to negative change, the absence of change, minimal change, or to enhance the positive changes that result from the initiative. See the PDSA cycle diagram on page 108.	
16.	Provide opportunities and venues for local organizations to share their efforts with each other.	
17.	Advocate that local funders and policy makers support the implementation of quality improvement initiatives through locally allocated financial support and policies that align with hyperlocal needs, assets, and input.	

Supporting Documents/Templates

Phase 2 Community Feedback: Key Informant Meetings/Focus Group Protocol

Participants: 10–12 people in each of 2–3 focus groups; target participants work within the sectors of women in coaching or girls in sports from a variety of organizations in your region

Location: In person and Zoom (opportunistically as part of another meeting or group gathering); try for at least one and preferably two in-person events.

Duration: 1.5 hours

Layout: If in-person, preference for sitting around a large table or in a circle (rather than auditorium style)

Materials/Supplies: computer and projector, whiteboard or flipchart paper and easel, photocopies of report, PowerPoint slides, and/or other brief summary documents, stickers (to vote on priorities), sign-in sheet (names, emails, and organizations), QR code or other link to brief participant online demographic survey.

Facilitator(s): two members of the core leadership team (e.g., regional leader in women in coaching/girls in sports, researcher/evaluator)

Assign notetaker in person and/or use AI to take notes

Agenda:

- **Welcome and introductions**
 - go around table and each introduce (name, how are they today (scale of 1–5), organization, connection to or interest in the topic areas)
 - consider icebreakers, polls about something familiar (to facilitate engagement)
- **Brief summary of the key findings** (no more than 20 minutes) using both hand-outs and PowerPoint slides
- **Discussion of key findings** (group breaks out into 3–4 groups; may split into subtopics (e.g., women in coaching and girls' participation in sports))
 - What resonated with you? What rings true for your region?
 - What did you find surprising or new? Do you think this is relevant to your region?
 - What do you see are the top priorities in your region? (make an exhaustive list of everything people mention)
 - Elicit feedback on why these are identified as top priorities, take notes on these reasons

- **Report out** from small groups
- **List top priorities separately on flip chart paper** (or clearly circle/underline the priorities listed in the brainstorm) and provide 3 stickers to each person to vote on their top priorities. Invite participants to stand up, approach the paper and place their votes. (Note: if there is limited time, invite participants to each write their three priorities on a sticky note and leave it on their table).
 - If in Zoom, list the top priorities on the screen (share screen of the notes)
 - Launch poll that asks folks to type in their top three priorities from the list provided on the screen (1 poll question, open-ended, long answer)
 - Retrieve poll results from Zoom to report to project lead
- **Close with thanks and explanation of next steps**
 - Share results with lead evaluator, who will synthesize the findings from all groups in each region
 - Meeting of leaders from both regions to discuss the findings related to priorities and connect these priorities to new or existing best practices nationally and regionally to address the priorities
 - Facilitate regional conversations about these practices/strategies to address the priority issues, feature examples from the regions. Possible questions: What exists that can be amplified or extended? What does not exist that should? What strategies are low-/no-cost and what are approaches that may require more resources? What resources are needed to carry out the strategies? What are the short-term solutions and what may take longer to implement?
 - Final synthesis of priorities and aligned regionally recommended solutions/strategies to be shared to inform regional organizations, funders, and other key stakeholders

If you are working in multiple regions, you may have teams working to collect this information in each region. Here is guidance for the final deliverables from each region for Phase 2 Community Feedback:

1. Copy of sign-in sheets/attendance from each focus group (including date, location, and facilitators)
2. Clear photographs of flip chart or white board notes (if using white board, remember to take a photo before erasing)
3. Copy of notes taken during each focus group (Google Doc or Word preferred)
4. Copy of priority ranking (either photo of flip chart with the stickers or export from Zoom polls of the responses)

For all Phase 2 Community Feedback, use a shared folder (Google Folder, One Drive, Box, etc.). Ensure all participating team members place all materials in the shared file in the appropriate folder for their region and the session.

Phase 2 Community Feedback Example Invitation

Good Afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well and Happy New Year! I am thrilled to invite you to a special **Women in Sports Networking Brunch**, where we will gather to discuss the future of women in coaching.

This event will be an opportunity to connect with fellow female coaches, share insights, and explore strategies to empower and sustain women in coaching. We'll also review the results of the recent **WNY Women in Coaching Survey** and dive into two key topics:

1. **How do we increase women in coaching?**
2. **How do we sustain women in coaching?**

Kindly RSVP: HERE by _____. If you have any questions, please contact _____

Let's work together to elevate the role of women in sports coaching. I look forward to seeing you there!

We would love to have your voice at the table to shape actionable steps for positive change.

Event Details

Date:

Time:

Location:




Women Coaching in WNY

We need **YOU** to contribute to this national conversation with local impact!



Our conversation with local women coaches will include a networking brunch & discussion on:

- Reviewing results from WNY women in coaching survey.
- How do we increase women in coaching?
- How do we sustain women in coaching?

Join our team in person for a conversation

Date: 1/18/2025
Time: 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.
Place: Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
 Larkin at Exchange
 726 Exchange Street, Suite 525
 Buffalo, NY 14210

Conference room:
 Change Makers

RSVP by 1/10/25 to:
 Jami Pereira
 at jamiap@cgb.org

PROJECT PLAY WESTERN NEW YORK **WSF** Women's Sports Foundation.

Phase 3 Identify Promising Practices: Example Tables of Issues Aligned With Strategies

Population: Coaches; Topic Area: Training	
Issue	Strategy
<p>Need for more women in coaching (and need for more coaches in general)</p> <p>People don't see themselves as coaches or define coaching too narrowly.</p> <p>Need for succession planning</p> <p>Need to prevent repeating unproductive coaching strategies (coaching as they were coached)</p>	<p>Training content should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship building. For girls, community comes before competition — need to build relationship first. Definition of coach — What does it actually mean? What role does a coach play? Redefine the skill set that is needed to be a coach (e.g., you don't have to play/do the sport). Confidence building and managing parent dynamics, coaches can build relationships with both the youth and the parents/families. Cultural considerations (e.g., Muslim communities' need to ensure girls are not seen by males during practice/games) Specific needs of girls (e.g., sports bras, feminine hygiene, need for adequate facilities at practice and games) Representation of all sports How to create student manager positions on teams. This can increase interest in coaching of the sport and being a part of the training process <p>Training format/frequency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing training and information Junior coach/mentor programs are effective for creating pipelines of coaches and increasing confidence Free/low-cost
Population: Coaches; Topic Area: Sports Organization Policies and Practices	
Issue	Strategy
<p>There are inequalities in pay between male and female coaches (men get paid more and more frequently)</p> <p>Coaching boys' teams often pays more in the same sport.</p> <p>Those who get paid often get more credit or clout than those who are volunteers.</p> <p>Women undervalue themselves and are undervalued as coaches.</p> <p>People don't see themselves as coaches or define coaching too narrowly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaches should be equitably paid; identify sources of funding to support this. Define what a coach is — What does it actually mean? What role does a coach play? Redefine the skill set that is needed to be a coach (e.g., you don't have to play/do the sport).
<p>Scheduling is difficult when navigating competing family and work responsibilities. Sufficient advance notice is needed to retain coaches who have busy personal and work lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations should work to build strong relationships with coaches, to meet them where they are, and to be transparent about expectations and have schedules communicated clearly well in advance for planning Flexible schedules or part-time coaching opportunities
<p>Coaches sometimes have to navigate difficult interactions with parents. They need preparation to do so and support from organizational staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations can "protect" coaches from parents by establishing norms/policies for what to expect and how to engage with coaches

Population: Coaches; Topic Area: Culture and Climate of Women in Sports

Issue	Strategy
Lack of awareness and prioritization of women/girls in sports and the importance of more women coaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify marketing strategies that have worked — what are some models that are working well?
Difficulties for girls in the LGBTQ+ community to participate in sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at sports where there were successful transitions to both boys' and girls' sport to replicate the strategies (learn from basketball to improve transition in flag football) — how to encourage girls in flag football to stay in the game and come back and coach. (About 10 years ago, first female coach in the NFL) Networking opportunities with other women coaches

Population: Youth/Girls; Topic Area: Opportunities to Play

Issue	Strategy
Girls prefer to play on girls' teams (vs. coed) and prefer female coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for additional coaches to support
Limited opportunities/options for sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More sports opportunities for girls — and sport sampling. Some urban schools have very few options for girls (or youth in general) (relates to staffing/coaching, funding and facilities) (examples: field hockey, flag football — leverage these stories to generate awareness and interest)
After-school commitments compete with the ability to do sports (family responsibilities, homework)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-school opportunities or support for transportation
Sports are more structured and goal-oriented rather than just fun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring fun and play back to increase motivation to play
If they don't make the school team, they quit the sport. Low awareness of other opportunities outside of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present other options during try-outs — have lists of other organizations, including less- or non-competitive ones
Opportunities to participate in community sports or programs external to school are often offered during evening hours when it's unsafe to walk or transportation is not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer weekend/summer programs during the daytime Set up community transportation for participants?

Population: Youth/Girls; Topic Area: Resources to Play

Issue	Strategy
Economics/finances are a major barrier (transportation, equipment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial assistance programs, transportation to and from practice and games
Equipment: sneakers, sports bras, hygiene products — deodorant and feminine hygiene products and information, in addition to the equipment associated directly with specific sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial assistance programs
Need facilities with adequate/accessible bathrooms (often are locked or dirty or only porta-potties), non-functioning or no water fountains, unmaintained fields, no concessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facility renovations and construction, identification of existing facilities that could be shared use
Need facilities that can accommodate more sports for more of the year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facility renovations and construction, identification of existing facilities that could be shared use
Not all sports are available within all school districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase funding and opportunities for girls to participate in any sport they may be interested in
Girls also want to participate in community-based sports during the summer outside of the school season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities in sports through community centers and programs for girls, sports sampling programs

Population: Youth/Girls; Topic Area: Connections with Coach and Peers

Issue	Strategy
For girls, community comes before competition — need to build relationship first. They love hanging out with their friends. It's even better if they can be playing a sport.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for girls to bring friends. Build relationships with the girls on the team and create opportunities for them to get to know each other. Curricula like that associated with "Girls on the Run" facilitates this.
Girls need coaches with similar lived experiences as them, women specifically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit female coaches Recruit female coaches from black and brown communities (i.e., black girls want black coaches).
Coaches can be a source of stress and reason to quit if they are too hard on girls or picking on them. They can take all the fun out of sports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide supportive coaching. This is extremely impactful, particularly in the absence of strong parental/family support.
Many coaches do not understand the health impacts that girls face through improper/overtraining, especially related to menstruation and eating habits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit female coaches who understand the signs of disordered eating and who girls feel comfortable talking to about period cramps and fatigue during menstruation Advocacy for proper nutrition

Population: Youth/Girls; Topic Area: Balance

Issue	Strategy
Need balance between competition and fun/connection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to coach training. Competition can give girls confidence and motivation. But caution that overly competitive or serious teammates can detract from experience.
Youth experience a lot of mental health burden related to school and the national and global environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls need opportunities to "take a breather" to take care of mental health through journaling, rest, etc.
A balance between all-girls and co-ed activities would be helpful to allow girls to become more comfortable playing a sport, as well as feel confident to play in front of boys and an audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More opportunities in the community and at schools to facilitate all-girls participation and co-ed support

Population: Youth/Girls; Topic Area: Culture and Climate of Sports

Issue	Strategy
There's a feeling that you need to make the travel team or you're not good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work to change this narrative in organizational communications and practices.
As girls get older, sometimes they face peer pressure: "you're not a baby, you shouldn't be playing – you should act more mature."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normalize play and sport participation for girls (through more opportunities and support).
Girls feel that boys are judging them or making fun of them when they try to play a sport or become involved in physical activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide more opportunities for girls to participate in an all-girls environment (female coach also). Normalize sport participation for girls and increase co-ed involvement in gym classes for boys and girls to play on a team together.

Phase 3 Prioritizing Promising Practices: Impact Effort Matrix

	Low Effort	High Effort
High Impact	Quick wins — Prioritize Efforts	Major Projects, valuable but will require significant resources
Low Impact	Fill-ins — do when time allows	Avoid — waste of time, reevaluate

Phase 4 Protocol for Local Conversations

1. Convene the core leadership team and **brainstorm a list of organizations and people** who are known to be effective/successful in your topic of interest. For example, we wanted to talk with folks who had been successful at engaging and sustaining girls in sports and women in coaching.
2. **Assign outreach liaisons** on the core leadership team to each of the organizations/people that have been identified. They will send a “warm-handoff” email to their selected acquaintances or colleagues to introduce them to the interviewer/discussion facilitator.
3. The **discussion facilitator will then follow up** with email or phone call to provide additional information as well as at least five suggested dates and times that they are available to meet (virtually if outside the region or offer the option for in-person if in the same region).
4. When the discussion facilitator schedules the meeting, use a **calendar invitation**, including the link to the virtual meeting and the discussion topics/prompts to help the participant prepare for the conversation.
5. On the day before the meeting, send a **follow-up email** to remind about/confirm the meeting and include the meeting logistics to facilitate ease of finding and joining the meeting.
6. At the start of the meeting: If in-person, **ask permission to audio record**. Use a small digital audio recorder or a smart phone. Ensure that you have sufficient battery and storage space. If in a virtual meeting, ask permission to record the meeting. You can then download the recording and associated transcript from the virtual meeting software.
7. Follow up with a **thank-you message** for meeting, reiterating the approximately timeline for when they can expect to read the vignettes that are developed from their interview.
8. Follow up with the **draft vignettes and solicit feedback**. Provide a deadline for that feedback and send reminders to the participant. Sometimes this may include calling in addition to emailing.
9. Finalize vignette(s) and participant name and contact information for inclusion in the final report.

Example Liaison Invitation Email:

Our team has been working with _____(person) and _____(sponsoring organization) for the past couple of years. They are conducting a study of women in coaching and girls in sports in the _____ region as part of a project funded by _____. We know there is a lot of work to be done to increase and retain girls’ participation in sports and women in coaching. We also know that many organizations and individuals have made significant strides in this direction. We would like to spend about an hour of time with a few organizations that can share stories of how

they have tackled the barriers to girls in sports and women in coaching. This may be related to finding and retaining women coaches (particularly coaches of color) or it may be related to strategies to support girls socially and emotionally while also providing sports opportunities. Organizations also may have creative strategies to address financial barriers that impact transportation, enrollment fees, and access to equipment. While we know that more resources are needed – we want to celebrate the successful strategies that exist and can potentially be replicated by others.

These stories will be collected and summarized for publication alongside the key findings from this study of women and girls in sports. Those who share their stories will have an opportunity to review the summaries before they are published.

This can be a Zoom or Google Meet call or a phone call. It will take no more than an hour. We would like to record it so we capture all of the details.

Please let us know if you are interested. _____ will follow up with additional details and to answer any questions you have.

Thanks in advance for your time!

(closing and name of sender)

Follow-up email from discussion facilitator to organization to prepare them for the interview/discussion:

Wonderful. Thanks for the connection, _____(name of liaison).

_____(name of contacted person), if you’re interested, I’d love to schedule time to chat with you.

What would work best for you? Would you like to meet in-person or talk on the phone or video conference (Zoom, Google Meet, or Teams)?

Here are some times in the coming weeks that I’m available:

<insert at least 5 days and times>

Here are a couple of general questions to consider for our conversation:

Related to engaging girls in sports:

We know that girls often leave sports around middle school/just before high school. There are some programs and sports that successfully retain or even newly engage girls in sports, though. We want to hear about those successes. From the literature, surveys, and conversations so far, we have heard that we need to create strong relationships between the girls and between coaches and girls; that girls really value female coaches; that often there are economic barriers affecting access to transportation, enrollment fees, and equipment; and sometimes girls confront a number of competing demands for their time.

- Where have there been really good strategies to build relationships between the girls in the sport and help to retain them in the sport?

- Do you have strategies for addressing the economic barriers (e.g., transportation, enrollment fees, equipment)?
- How do you balance fun with healthy levels of competition?
- What are other ways that you have kept girls engaged?

Related to women in coaching:

- Where is coach training for women working well?
- Where have there been good strategies to recruit and retain female coaches?
- What are some examples of organizational policies and practices that create a culture of support for female coaches?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks very much,

(name of sender)

Example follow-up reminder email

Good morning, _____.(name of interviewee)

Looking forward to talking with you this _____(insert date and time).

Here are a couple of general questions to consider for our conversation:

Related to engaging girls in sports:

We know that girls often leave sports around middle school/just before high school. There are some programs and sports that successfully retain or even newly engage girls in sports, though. We want to hear about those successes. From the literature, surveys, and conversations so far, we have heard that we need to create strong relationships between the girls and between coaches and girls; that girls really value female coaches; that often there are economic barriers affecting access to transportation, enrollment fees, and equipment; and sometimes girls confront a number of competing demands for their time.

- Where have there been really good strategies to build relationships between the girls in the sport and help to retain them in the sport?
- Do you have strategies for addressing the economic barriers (e.g., transportation, enrollment fees, equipment)?
- How do you balance fun with healthy levels of competition?
- What are other ways that you have kept girls engaged?

General practices as well as specific stories/examples will be great to hear.

Here is the Zoom information: (insert Zoom link)

I'm looking forward to the conversation!

Warmly,

(name of sender)

Phase 4 Local Conversation Discussion Guide

- Date
- Name of Organization
- Website of Organization
- Name of interviewee(s) and their email addresses

Agenda for Discussion

- Introductions
- Overview of the agenda for the call
 - Example: We're going to spend about an hour today discussing the topic of girls in sports and women in coaching. This project is led by _____. I have been involved in this project _____(list details, history of involvement, share something personal about your connection to sports). This project is part of a multiyear initiative that began with a comprehensive literature review, followed by focus groups with girls in sports and women in coaching in each region, a survey sent out those populations, a community feedback phase where we presented the survey results and elicited feedback, synthesis of that feedback into key issues and promising practices/strategies, and this final stage of gathering examples of those practices already in action in some local organizations to serve as guidance for others. I would like to record us. Is that okay with you? This will be so I can make sure I don't miss anything. It will not be shared with others.
- Overview of yourself as the facilitator and your connection to the content/topic
- Ask about the interviewee's organization, their role, and connection to the content/topic.
- Initiate discussion on the targeted topic(s).

Example content:

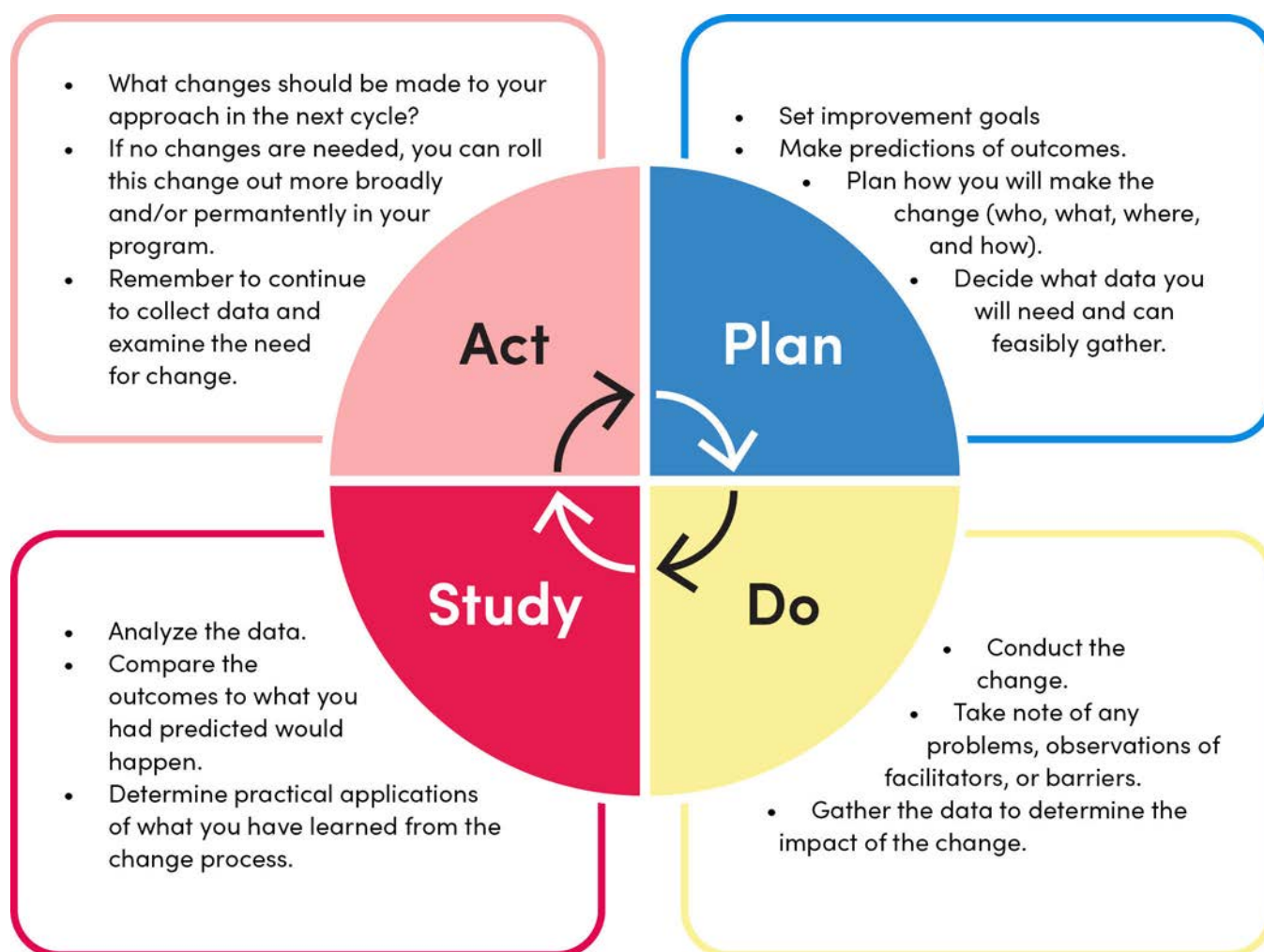
We know that girls often leave sports around middle school/just before high school. Have you noticed this too? Or have you noticed different trends?

- Related to the need for strong relationships for retention: Where have there been really good strategies to build relationships between the girls in the sport and help to retain them in the sport?
- Related to address barriers we've heard about: Do you have strategies for addressing the economic barriers (e.g. transportation, enrollment fees, equipment)?
- Related to reports of overly competitive or stressful environments: How do you balance fun with healthy levels of competition?

- What are other ways that you have kept girls engaged?
- Related to attracting and retaining female coaches, it often comes down to experience and confidence:
 - Where is coach training for women working well?
 - Where have there been good strategies to recruit and retain female coaches?
- What are some examples of organizational policies and practices that create a culture of support for female coaches? (prompts may include pairing new with experienced coaches, establishing mentorship, providing predictable schedules, creating youth pipelines for coaching, etc.)
- Closing and explanation of next steps
 - Explain how the data will be used.
 - Example: Over the next few weeks, I will work on synthesizing the feedback I've collected from you and other folks like you who are on the ground doing this work. I will create 2-3 vignettes that capture strategies you are implementing in your organization. I will share these with you to ensure they are accurate and acceptable to you. I will also confirm that you would like your name and contact information shared as part of the resulting report.
 - Thank them for their time. Relate to them about something that you discussed (e.g., "good luck on that upcoming event"). Let them know you'll be in touch within (insert approximate timeframe).

Phase 6: PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) Cycle Diagram

An iterative, four-stage problem-solving model that can be used for improving a process or carrying out change.



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