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Campaign aims to steer girls onto right path

Goals are to prevent risky behaviors, foster self-esteem

By Judi Hanson
USA TODAY

The number of eighth-grade girls who smoke cigarettes every day has jumped dramatically in the last five years.

The number of girls who drink has climbed, too. So has marijuana use among these young teenagers.

Almost one third of ninth-grade girls report they've had sex at least once. Nearly half of all teenagers infected with AIDS are young girls.

With these alarming statistics in mind, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Donna Shalala launches a public relations campaign today to give girls a positive message about their lives.

The goal is to steer them clear of risky behaviors like sex, drug use and alcohol use.

Called Girl Power!, it will target girls between ages 9 and 14 with TV, radio and print ads, posters displayed at 500 shopping malls



Shalala: 'Comprehensive approach'

and a Girl Power! site on the Internet's World Wide Web. The message also will be targeted to adults with teen friends and family.

In an advance text of the speech, Shalala tells the American Public Health Association that "too many girls, once full of resilience, somehow lose their very selves and enter the second decade of their lives without the strength that got them there."

"We want to reach girls with targeted messages about the behaviors they should avoid, but also with strong positive messages to reinforce their confidence and sense of possibility," Shalala says.

Among those helping to publicize the message are ER star Julianne Margulies, who will do TV spots, and Dominique Dawes, 1996 Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics, who will appear in print ads.

But Girl Power! is not a "one-size-fits-all campaign," says Shalala. "It's not a one issue campaign that provides only one answer: Say no."

"It takes a comprehensive approach," she says. "It looks at the multiple risks facing young adolescent girls — at the health issues and the erosion of self-confidence — and then it sets about trying to prevent them. All of them."

Studies have shown ages 9 to 14 are the most vulnerable for girls to lose their self-confidence and embark on dangerous habits. Those are also the ages when girls are more likely to be depressed and attempt suicide.

The program, costing \$800,000, was developed with the help of girls nationwide, says Nelda Chavez, who heads the HHS substance abuse and mental health program.

"Our culture bombards these girls with messages to stay thin, attract boys, consume harmful drugs and focus more on what others think of them than what they think of themselves," says Chavez. "Government must be working with other positive forces to combat these messages."



Dawes: Will appear in Girl Power! ads

HHS FACT SHEET

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

HHS GIRL POWER! CAMPAIGN

"Girl Power!" is a multi-issue, national public education campaign sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to help encourage and empower 9- to 14-year-old girls to make the most of their lives. Studies show that girls tend to lose self confidence and self worth during this pivotal age, becoming less physically active, performing less well in school, and neglecting their own interests and aspirations. It's during these years that girls become more vulnerable to negative outside influences and to mixed messages about risky behaviors.

Girl Power! is combining strong "no-use" messages about tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs with an emphasis on providing opportunities for girls to build skills and self-confidence in academics, arts, sports, and other endeavors. It will also address related issues such as teen pregnancy prevention, physical activity, nutrition, and mental health.

Secretary Shalala recently announced a Girl Power! grant program designed to help communities develop innovative and comprehensive approaches to prevent teen pregnancy and promote good health among 9-14 year-old girls. In addition, to provide positive messages, accurate health information, and support for girls and those who care about them, Girl Power! campaign products include a diary for girls containing writings and drawings by girls ages 9-14, and a Girl Power! Hometown Press Kit with sample media pieces, fact sheets, and radio and print public service announcements (PSAs) easily adaptable for local use. Other campaign materials include:

- Television, Radio, and Print PSAs and posters featuring Dominique Dawes, 1996 Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics
- Poster displays in 500 shopping malls via 3-M Media ("Have You Got It? Girl Power! We've Got the Power to be Drug Free!")
- Girl Power! web site on the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) home page at <http://www.health.org/gpower/>
- Girl Power! bookmarks, baseball caps, and other products

Three aspects of the Girl Power! campaign set it apart from past government efforts:

- The Girl Power! campaign recognizes that while some health messages work equally well for boys and girls, girls also need to hear health messages targeted to their unique needs, interests, and challenges.
- The Girl Power! campaign takes a comprehensive approach, addressing not only a range of health issues but also the erosion of self confidence, motivation, and opportunity that is all too typical for many girls during the transitional period of 9-14 years of age.

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- The Girl Power! campaign is also based on research indicating that girls at the age of 8 or 9 typically have very strong attitudes about their health. According to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America's *1995 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study*, for example, the overwhelming majority of girls and boys in grades 4 through 6 believe that "using drugs is dangerous." Younger girls also tend to be more physically active than older girls. This campaign works to reinforce and sustain these positive values among girls ages 9-14.

Research shows that early adolescence is a critical transition time from childhood to adolescence. It is a time of experimentation, risk taking, and growing independence. However, girls and boys experience some aspects of early adolescence in different ways, because they encounter different social, cultural, physiological and psychological challenges. For example, research shows that among girls, puberty tends to bring a higher incidence of depression, while among boys, puberty tends to increase the occurrence of aggressive behavior. According to HHS' 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, ninth-grade girls are nearly twice as likely as ninth-grade boys to have thought seriously about attempting suicide in the past year (34.4 percent versus 18.2 percent) and more than twice as likely to attempt suicide at least once in the past year (14.9 percent versus 6.8 percent).

According to the Carnegie Corporation of New York's *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*, "nearly half of all American adolescents are at high or moderate risk of seriously damaging their life chances." Substance abuse in particular is an increasing problem among girls. HHS' 1995 Monitoring the Future Study, conducted by the University of Michigan, reports that daily cigarette use among eighth-grade girls (ages 13-14) jumped 48 percent between 1991 and 1995; nearly one out of every ten eighth-grade girls (9.2 percent) is now a daily cigarette smoker. Since 1991, the rate of past-month marijuana use among eighth-grade girls has risen slightly faster than the rate among boys, rising from 2.6 percent in 1991 to 8.2 percent in 1995. Alcohol use is also too high: nearly one fourth (24.0 percent) of eighth-grade girls say they consumed alcohol in the past month. And girls are at particular risk for depression, sedentary lifestyles, sexual abuse, and other problems associated with substance abuse. Studies also show that girls tend to lose self confidence in early adolescence and, as a result, perform less well in school and neglect their interests and aspirations.

These changes reflect, in part, a new set of messages girls can receive at this age. For example:

- Some girls who experienced adult and peer approval for demonstrating athletic abilities before puberty may be discouraged from participating in many sports once their bodies show signs of maturing.
- Girls who performed well in the classroom at ages 9, 10, or 11 often perform less well in school at age 14, and may receive less incentive to actively participate in class discussions, with many teachers giving greater attention to boys in their classrooms.

- MORE -

- Girls in their early teens are often encouraged to place more emphasis on their personalities, social skills, looks, and ability to please others than on developing their own interests and aspirations. Studies show, for example, that 10- and 11-year-old girls are already concerned about controlling their weight. According to HHS' 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, nearly two-thirds (63.8 percent) of ninth-grade girls report attempting to lose weight in the previous month.
- Girls and boys share many of the same personal and social-environmental reasons for smoking, such as low educational aspirations, low self-esteem, risk-taking, lower socioeconomic status, and smoking by parents, siblings, and friends. However, girls appear to smoke more for social reasons than boys, who smoke more to relieve stress and to "get along" in life. Girls are also much more likely than boys to report weight control as a benefit of smoking.

The goal of the Girl Power! campaign is to galvanize parents, schools, communities, religious organizations, health providers, and other caring adults to make regular, sustained efforts to reinforce girls' self confidence, by providing girls with positive messages, meaningful opportunities, and accurate information about key health issues. For example, Secretary Shalala joined with the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, the Girl Scouts, NIKE and professional women basketball players at the NCAA Women's Basketball Final Four to release the first government report to look at the positive impact of sports and physical activity on all aspects of a girl's life. Girl Power! has over 100 private and public partners, including the Elks Club, Girls Inc., the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the National 4-H Council, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the National Association of School Nurses, and Jane Cosmetics by Sassaby. Additionally, NBC - "The More You Know" aired TV PSAs with Julianna Margulies, star of NBC's "ER." Dominique Dawes, 1996 Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics, recently aired her "Girl Power!" radio PSA at an ABC radio Town Hall Meeting with President Clinton - and she will continue to help promote the "Girl Power" campaign.

Under the leadership of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Girl Power! campaign was developed in consultation with the many health agencies that make up HHS and with national, state, and local organizations that serve girls. However, Girl Power! is also a product of the girls themselves. Across the country, girls from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds shared their concerns and ideas with SAMHSA in focus groups that provided the basis for the "Girl Power!" slogan. As a result, the Girl Power! campaign combines the latest knowledge about girls' lives with messages and materials designed to be appealing to girls and to the adults who care about them.

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Individuals and organizations who want to participate in the campaign or receive materials, can call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at 1-800-729-6686 (TDD 1-800-487-4889) or visit the World Wide Web at <http://www.health.org/gpower/> or <http://www.health.org> (NCADI). GIRL POWER! spokespersons are available for interview. To arrange an interview, call the HHS Press Office at 690-6343.

REMARKS BY

DONNA E. SHALALA

SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

GIRLS IN THE MEDIA

MAY 1, 1997

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

I was giving a speech recently to the only audience tougher than the media children.

And they introduced me as one of the most powerful women in America.

A kid in the front row shouted out, "Oh yeah, what channel are you on?"

The truth is, even before Peggy's uncle wrote that classic movie, "Mr. Smith Goes To Washington" Hollywood and Washington have always shared quite a bit.

We both make people laugh. You do it on purpose.

We have our own version of "All my Children." We call it Congress.

In Washington, when people say, "Break a leg" they mean it.

And you know you're having a bad morning, when you open the Washington Post and next to your name is the word, "Canceled."

Just like Mr. Smith, moving to Washington has certainly taken its toll on me. I used to be 12 inches taller.

So, why am I here? Let me start with why I am not here. I am not here to make headlines by blaming you for all the ills in our society. I am not here to advocate that government should run onto the set yelling, "rewrite!" After all, in this nation, we have a precious First Amendment that we all must honor.

And besides, I come from a Washington world where people still think that if you have something really important to tell children -- hand them a brochure. I don't know one young person who has spent 5 minutes reading a brochure. What they do is absorb popular culture by the ton. Logging on. Calling up. And, watching -- no, yelling -- at their television sets. And that is why I am here.

When I told people that I was coming out here to talk to the media about the health of young girls, a lot of them said, "Why? The media has nothing to do with the public health. Forget it."

And I will tell you what I told them. Believe it or not, you are part of the public health system. You increasingly fill the vacuum once occupied by traditional institutions -- like family and religion, schools and communities.

Young girls wear your clothes, tape your shows, read your magazines, buy your products with fierce loyalty -- loyalty elected officials could only dream of. They are watching and listening for hours on end, absorbing life lessons about values, lessons about their lives and futures; lessons about how to deal with dangers -- like teen pregnancy, drugs, and depression.

You have their attention. The question is, what are you going to tell them? And the answer is up to you. So, as I said, "I'm not here to shake my finger at you. But, I'm not here to tell you everything is o.k. either.

I'm here to challenge you as professionals, parents, and citizens to use your incredible power to help us transform the lives of young girls from a national tragedy into a national triumph.

I was thinking a lot about this speech last Thursday. It was Take Our Daughters to Work day -- and our department was hosting young girls from around DC. Anyone who has worked with young girls knows that they ended up hosting us.

But, the highlight of the day was an event we had with Gloria Steinem and the former Miss Black USA where the kids got a chance to ask questions. I wasn't exactly thrilled with the first question. "It was how old are you?" But, I was thrilled by the girls' responses. Especially their response to the posters we had of Olympic gymnast Dominique Dawes, who they say is a real role model.

It turns out that at age 6, when most kids are glued to the TV set, Dominique was writing this word, in crayon, over and over again on her bathroom mirror: Determination. That's what it takes to be a champion: determination.

And determination is what it's going to take from us to ensure that every girl -- every single girl -- looks in the mirror and calls herself a champion.

Right now, that is not the case. Right now, too many girls are spending hours in front of the mirror. Any parent will tell you that's nothing new. What is new is that they're peering at their reflections through a modern-day looking glass. The distorted images that they see upset them. And as people who care about children, they should scare us too.

I'm going to be blunt. We have a generation of 9 to 14 year old girls at serious risk. All of us have seen it happen to girls in our own lives. Young girls once strong and full of resilience, somehow lose their very selves during adolescence and enter the second decade of their lives without the strength and confidence that got them there.

While growing up these days is tough for everyone, the research tells us that girls experience adolescence differently than boys. While boys often become more aggressive, girls often turn inward and self-destruct. While boys often smoke to be rebellious, girls often do it to stay thin.

Young girls become less likely to engage in physical activity. More likely to be depressed. More likely to attempt suicide. And more likely to have a negative body image. What we know is that all of these factors are related, that no one problem stands alone, and that girls with poor body images often have the riskiest attitudes about tobacco, drugs, and sex.

And we know from surveys that more than half of nine year-olds have dieted. That's nine year olds. Unbelievable? Not when so much of their self image is tied up with being thin and attractive. And not when we've all heard stories of anorexic girls who hear people say, "you look great" right up until the time they are hospitalized.

A social worker in Los Angeles told me a story about a 14 year-old girl she was interviewing. When she asked the girl what she likes about herself, the answer is all too typical, "I don't know." But she does know what she would change about herself and here she rattles off a whole list of physical attributes like her eyes and hair and weight.

The truth is, this young woman, and too many like her, are more worried about gaining weight and being accepted than they are about excelling in school or staying healthy.

Let me be clear: This isn't all your fault. But, it is your problem. It is my problem. It is our problem. It's an American problem. And, together we have a responsibility to help solve it.

That's the purpose behind our Girl Power! campaign: to team up with parents and other adults to help 9-14 year-old girls make the most of their lives.

Not with a one-size-fits-all campaign of the past. The kind that treats problems in isolation and provides only one answer: Say no. We've taken a comprehensive approach. With targeted health messages about the behaviors -- like drugs, smoking and teen pregnancy -- that girls should avoid, yes. But also with strong positive messages about leadership, opportunity, and physical activity -- messages that tap into the strength girls have when they are younger.

With PSAs, hats, diaries, billboards and other materials, we are telling every girl: You are unique. You are valuable. And, if you put your mind to it, you can succeed.

So, what does Girl Power mean to young girls? I put that question to girls during Take Our Daughters to Work Day. And, as usual, they said it far better than I ever could. They wrote "Girl Power is being anything you want to be. Increasing your knowledge, helping others. Girl Power is standing up for what you believe in. Choosing right from wrong. Exercising. Being Drug Free." And finally, a young girl simply wrote, "I think Girl Power is special."

Our job is to ensure that every girl feels this way throughout her life. And that's what we're working to do. Let me give you just a few recent examples. Last month, I went to the Women's Final Four to release the first ever government report showing that sports and physical activity can have a positive impact on all aspects of a girl's life.

For the first time in history, a President is taking big steps to kick Joe Camel and the Marlboro Man out of our children's lives. Just last week, for the first time, a Judge said that yes, cigarettes are a drug delivery device. And yes, the FDA can regulate them. This is an historic public health triumph -- a triumph we should all be proud of.

And today, I'm also proud to be kicking off Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month by announcing some more good news. We are releasing a study today showing that for the first time in more than 20 years, 15-19 year old girls are less likely to have sex. And if they do have sex, they're more likely to use contraceptives.

These positive trends are the same for teenage boys. They're part of the reason we're finally seeing declines in teen pregnancy rates. And what they tell us is that teenagers are hearing the message that sex and pregnancy puts them on a fast track to a bad future. And they're hearing the message that condoms can prevent pregnancy, AIDS, and other STDs.

But these results also tell us that it's too late to start talking to girls at age 15. We need to reach them early. On this and every issue. That's why I am pleased to announce today two new grant programs that fill important gaps in our fight against teen pregnancy.

First, we are dedicating one million dollars this year to communities -- so they can work with volunteers to give 9-14 year-old girls the confidence and opportunities they need to abstain from sex and other risky behaviors -- and make the most of their lives. I am also announcing today another million dollars in grants to educate and encourage young males to make responsible decisions.

But, whether the message is sports or teen pregnancy prevention, the government will never be able to deliver it alone. It's going to take each and every one of us. That was the message of the President's volunteerism summit. And that is why, as part of Girl Power!, Dominique Dawes is appearing in print and radio PSAs.

It's why we're teaming up with the U.S. National Women's Soccer team to send clear messages to girls that tobacco and fitness just don't mix. It's why I joined with NIKE's P.L.A.Y. CORPS program last week to announce a new partnership aimed at training college-age coaches to work with young girls. And, it's why I am here today. To ask for your help and your leadership.

When I was growing up, I still remember how my parents and other caring adults encouraged me. By telling me I played a good game. That I delivered a good line. That I was special. Yet, while parents are still by far the most influential people in girls' lives, we know that girls too often turn away from them just when they need them the most.

Instead, girls today often look to their peers and to our most powerful mirror -- the mirror of popular culture -- to tell them who they are and who they should be. But, when they look in that mirror, what do they see?

I am speaking to you as a talented and privileged few, with great power, but also great responsibility. And I am speaking to you as leaders who have already helped us make great progress in the last 20 years -- progress in the numbers and types of girls depicted in the media.

When girls click on the TV today, they see more women like Elaine on "Seinfeld" with good jobs and a good sense of humor. They see more girls like Claudia on "Party of Five" who not only shows great musical skills, but also strong personal skills as she navigates through real life issues like her brother's alcoholism and her violin teacher's homosexuality.

They see articles like the one appearing in Seventeen this month about choosing the right college. And they see girls like Lisa on the "Simpsons," whose intelligence and saxophone playing put Bart and the other boys to shame. I'm actually told that some teachers give Lisa credit for the recent surge in saxophone interest among girls in band class.

So, have we come a long way? Absolutely. But, we still have much to do.

Because too often our culture still bombards girls with images that tell them that being unnaturally thin -- actually gaunt -- is sexy and healthy. They're told that smoking will make them thin and glamorous and cool and successful. That it's "a woman thing." And they're told that drinking will make them feel popular and grown-up.

What the Children Now/Kaiser Family Foundation survey showed is that, despite improvements, girls are still depicted more often talking about their appearances and romantic relationships and less often talking about their jobs.

And many characters on shows are becoming thinner and thinner, actually reaching weights that are unhealthy and unattainable.

At the same time, about 70 percent of girls say they have wanted to look like a character on TV and almost a third of girls have changed their appearance to make it happen. And in an article about make-up, a young girl's magazine this month shows a girl's picture with these words: "Look sexy -- not silly."

I ask again: When they look in the mirror, what are girls seeing? Too often they are seeing that they don't measure up to the images created for them. That they're not good enough. Or thin enough. Or pretty enough. And boys are learning lessons too. Lessons about how to value and treat girls.

I know that many of you are entertainers and business people by trade. I know that you need to be ever mindful of the bottom line of ratings and profits. But, there is another bottom line that I'm asking you to pay attention to. It's your role as citizens and guardians of the public trust. And, it's the bottom line of young girls and their families.

You alone will probably never save or ruin a young girl's life. But what you show girls can have a tremendous impact on how they view themselves and how others -- boys and adults alike -- view them. That's why I'm asking you to take an even larger role in the great national drama to improve the health of American girls.

I'm asking you to think about the public health consequences of every thing you do. I'm asking you to join with us to send the right messages to girls -- the same messages we'd like our daughters or other family members to hear. Put simply, I'm asking you to hold up a more accurate mirror.

First, I challenge you to use your immense creativity to develop programming appropriate for 9-14 year-old girls. From Saturday morning cartoons to Seventeen, there is a wealth of programs and products for very young girls and for older girls. But, there is a gap in the middle.

We all know that girls have a tendency to be attracted to images and problems faced by older girls. And that's especially true when they don't have many great, more age-appropriate alternatives. But, there is a big untapped market and an even greater social need for materials that really speak to 9-14 year old girls. And we must create them.

Every time a girls sees a show or reads a magazine where all the girls pictured are paper thin, no one needs to explicitly say, "To be popular and successful, you must be gaunt." The message is clear. And the image created is outside the reach of most healthy girls.

That's why my second challenge is to create more characters, images, and role models that girls can reach and relate to. Girls who look like them and face everyday choices like them. Girls who make them proud of who they are and what they can become. Characters and images that teach both boys and girls to value girls who are smart and talented and confident and successful. All the things people want for their daughters.

Finally, and perhaps most important, we need to give girls and their parents information that will help -- not hinder -- their ability to navigate the rough waters of early adolescence.

If you're doing a story about a teenager getting pregnant, consider making the plot not just about passion, but about the consequences -- the poverty and lost futures that our research shows unwed mothers and their children are likely to face. If you're doing an article about eating disorders or depression or domestic violence, try giving girls and their parents places to turn for help. And if you're doing a show about smoking and drugs, you can find ways to show girls making the right choices and parents and peers sending the right messages. Messages that say smoking isn't cool.

I know -- and you know -- that education and entertainment can go hand in hand. And they must.

I understand that you're production schedules are grueling -- and that up-to-date public health information isn't just lying around the office. So, I've come here this afternoon to offer more than a challenge. I've come to offer help.

At our department, we have up-to-date information about the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco among girls. We have access to the best experts on issues ranging from depression to physical activity. We have information about approaches that work to cut down teen pregnancy and improve the health of girls. And, we have Girl Power! campaign materials that send girls the right messages about their bodies and minds -- indeed their futures.

You write the drama or develop the products, and we'll be there with the accurate information you need on any topic -- anytime. That's why I'm pleased to include in the packet you received today a number you can call at HHS -- and our web site address -- so you can get the facts you need when you need them.

I made the same offer when I spoke to talk show producers and then again to soap opera producers. Both times the naysayers said that the media leaders would simply put resources in the circular file. Both times they were wrong.

After those conferences, the calls started coming in -- and information started pouring out. It is my hope that this conference will strengthen the dialogue between leaders in the public health and entertainment industry.

Because, we all know that government doesn't raise children. Our schools don't raise children. And the media doesn't raise children. Parents raise children -- but, as the President's summit made clear, all of us have an obligation to give them a helping hand.

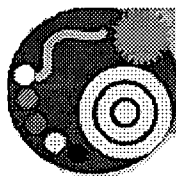
We need to ask ourselves, "When given the choice and the power to influence girls' lives, did we choose to have a positive effect, a negative effect, or no effect at all?"

Because, somewhere a girl is looking in the mirror today. What will she see? Will she know that her health and future are more important than her image? That the size of her ambition is more important than the size of her clothes? That the dreams she creates for herself are more important than those created for her by others? Will she, like Dominique Dawes look in the mirror and see not defeat, but determination?

A 9 year-old named Cherlnell does. She wrote a poem called, "What makes me feel powerful." "When I get an A+ or an A on a test. When I get told I am smart. When people tell me I will become something big. That's what makes me feel powerful. Strong-willed is independent and brave. And I'll stay like that forever"....

It is our job to ensure that every girl in this country "stays like that forever."

Thank you.



Girl Power! Press Releases

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 23, 1997

Contact: HHS Press Office,
(202) 690-6343



Secretary Shalala Kicks Off Nike National P.L.A.Y. Corps -- *Girl Power!* Partnership



Philadelphia -- HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala and professional women's basketball star Dawn Staley today launched a national initiative sponsored by NIKE to identify and train college students to coach at-risk children in city youth sport leagues. The new mentor-based sports program, P.L.A.Y. (Participate in the Lives of Youths) CORPS, will team up with the Department of Health and Human Services' "*Girl Power!*" campaign to target girls' sports participation.

The announcement comes just four days before Philadelphia hosts the first-ever President's Summit on America's Future. The goal of the President's Summit, to be held from April 27-29, is to mobilize all Americans to improve the lives and opportunities of our young people. With today's announcement, NIKE responds to President Clinton's challenge to corporations to step up to the plate and help our country's at-risk youth, Secretary Shalala said.

"President Clinton has challenged every corporation, every community, every citizen to reach out to children too often left out in the cold. NIKE's initiative will help meet the President's challenge by linking college students with at-risk children who need their support and guidance."

According to the 1996 study Physical Activity and Health: A Report by the

Surgeon General, only 25 percent of high school students are enrolled in daily physical education classes, and a full 60 percent of young people are not regularly active. In addition, girls are twice as likely to be inactive as boys. Girls living in poverty -- especially girls of color -- face even greater barriers, according to a report released in March 1997 by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

As Secretary Shalala said, "Together, we must help all children get off the sidelines and into the game."

Besides helping to build positive life experiences for children, P.L.A.Y. CORPS, modeled after President Clinton's Americorps initiative, helps college students get an education and give something back in return. P.L.A.Y. CORPS coaches receive \$500 towards their college tuition at the conclusion of their seasons.

NIKE's P.L.A.Y. CORPS, launched as a pilot program in 1996, currently has 100 coaches in Portland, Atlanta, Memphis, New York, and Philadelphia. In the 1997-1998 school year, P.L.A.Y. CORPS will expand nationwide to include youth leagues in cities across the country. In 1998, P.L.A.Y. CORPS hopes to have over 1,000 student coaches mentoring youth across the country.

The "***Girl Power!***" - P.L.A.Y. CORPS partnership announced today will help to put into action the findings of a report by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports released in March 1997 by HHS and the "***Girl Power!***" campaign. The report, entitled Physical Activity and Sports in the Lives of Girls, demonstrates that the benefits of physical activity and sports for girls extend beyond health to improved academic achievement, self-confidence, and better mental health.

NIKE's P.L.A.Y. CORPS initiative aims to increase opportunities for sports participation for both boys and girls, and to provide coaching opportunities for both men and women.

As part of the "***Girl Power!***" initiative, HHS will work with NIKE to help improve the training of coaches who work with girls to help break down obstacles that keep girls from getting involved and staying involved in sports and physical activity.

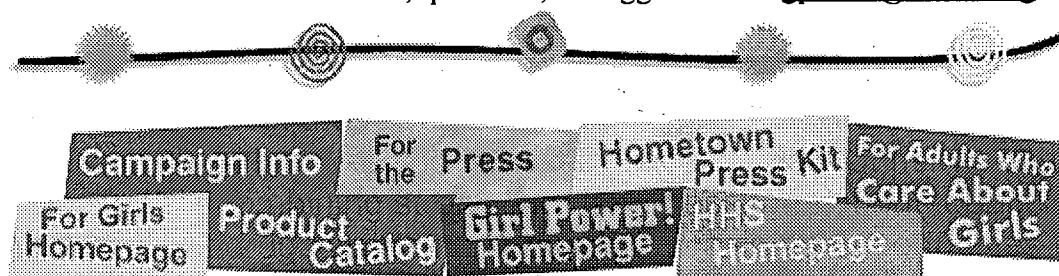
Launched in November 1996, "***Girl Power!***" is a multi-phase, national public education campaign sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services. Studies show that girls tend to lose self-confidence and

self worth during this pivotal age, becoming less physically active, performing less well in school, and neglecting their own interests and aspirations. It's during these years that girls become more vulnerable to negative outside influences and to mixed messages about risky behaviors. **"Girl Power!"** is combining strong "no use" messages about tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs with an emphasis on providing opportunities for girls to build skills and self-confidence in academics, arts, sports, and other endeavors.

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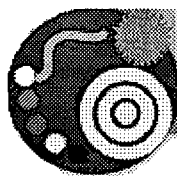
Please E-mail all comments, questions, or suggestions to gpower@health.org



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Girl Power! Press Releases

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mark Weber (SAMHSA)

Monday November 23, 1998

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2ND Anniversary of Girl Power! Campaign Girl Power! Sports Poster Now Available



Commemorating the second anniversary of Girl Power! -- a national public education campaign sponsored by HHS to help encourage and empower 9- to 14-year-old girls to make the most of their lives -- HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala today released the Girl Power! sports poster to stress the importance of physical activity and sports.

Two years ago, Secretary Shalala challenged caring adults to reach out to young girls at this transitional age when they are forming their values and attitudes. She encouraged adults to help young girls pursue opportunities to build skills and self-esteem through sports, academics, the arts, and other endeavors.

"Getting involved in sports such as basketball, tennis, and soccer builds self-confidence and self-esteem while also keeping young girls physically active," said Secretary Shalala. "These are vital skills and attitudes that will help girls throughout their adult lives."

Since 1996, the Girl Power! campaign has teamed up with 276 organizations and 59 national endorsers to promote the Girl Power! message. The Girl Power! campaign has collaborated with the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. to develop materials for young girls and worked with Olympic gold medalist Dominique Dawes to produce public service announcements and posters on physical fitness and staying drug-free.

Additionally, HHS has funded Girl Neighborhood Power!, a five-year grant program designed to help communities develop innovative approaches to promote the positive development, health, and well-being of girls, as well as

prevent teen pregnancy and the use of harmful substances.

The Girl Power! campaign takes a comprehensive approach, addressing not only a range of health issues but also the erosion of self-confidence, motivation, and opportunity that is all too typical for many girls during the transitional period of 9 to 14 years of age. Studies have shown that girls tend to lose self-confidence and self-worth during this pivotal age -- becoming less physically active, performing less well in school, and neglecting their own interests and aspirations.

It is during these years that girls become more vulnerable to negative outside influences and to mixed messages about risky behaviors. The Girl Power! campaign combines strong "no use" messages about tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs with emphasis on providing opportunities to build skills and self-confidence through many endeavors. The Girl Power! campaign also addresses related issues such as teen pregnancy prevention, physical activity, nutrition, and mental health.

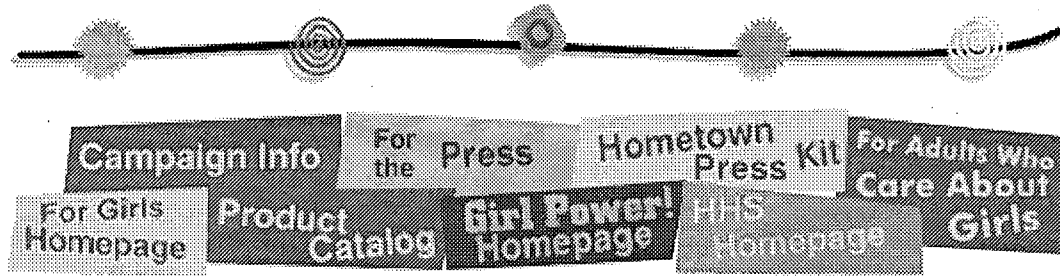
The Girl Power! campaign combines the latest knowledge about girls' lives with messages and materials designed to be appealing to girls and to the adults who care about them. However, Girl Power! is also a product of the girls themselves. In the formative stages of the campaign, girls from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds shared their concerns and ideas with HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which formed the basis for the Girl Power! campaign and its products. Girls continue to offer their input via the campaign web site.

To provide positive messages, accurate health information and support for girls and adults who care about them, the Girl Power! campaign offers many award-winning products. These include a campaign kit with helpful information for adults and community-based programs. For girls, the campaign provides fun and educational materials, such as posters, a diary, bookmarks, book covers, pins, and stickers. Girl Power! also has a highly successful and well-recognized web site (<http://www.health.org/gpower>) that has received more than five million hits since its launch. The web site provides a place where young girls can write about their concerns, find ideas for new activities, and get information.

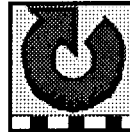
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Individuals and organizations interested in participating in the campaign, or who would like to order the new sports poster and other materials can call SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-729-6686 (TDD 1-800-487-4889) or visit the World Wide Web at <http://www.health.org/gpower>

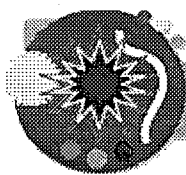
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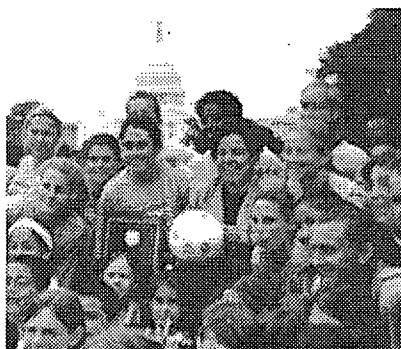
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What's Up With Girl Power!

Fall 1997

Secretary Releases Physical Fitness Report



To further emphasize the benefits of sports, Secretary Shalala presented the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team with an award for their efforts in preventing tobacco use.

On Friday, March 28, 1997, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala joined the Nation's top female basketball players and coaches to encourage more young girls to participate in sports. With the NCAA Women's Final Four Championship as a backdrop, Secretary Shalala released a report which demonstrates that the benefits of physical activity and sports for girls extend beyond physical health to improved academic achievement, self-confidence, and better mental health.

A part of the **Girl Power!** campaign, the report, *Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach*, is the first government report that takes an interdisciplinary approach in examining the impact of sports and physical activity on all aspects of a girl's life.

"Sports and physical activity participation can help girls avoid the dangerous minefields of adolescence and reach their full potential," said Secretary Shalala. "We've come a long way in breaking down barriers for girls, but now we need to work together to help get girls off the sidelines and onto the fields."

Specific conclusions of the President's Council report are:

- Girls' early involvement in physical activity and sports can reduce their likelihood of developing a number of chronic diseases and

unhealthy conditions, such as coronary heart disease and high cholesterol.

- Regular physical activity can help girls build greater peak bone mass, thereby reducing adult risk of osteoporosis.
- Exercise and sport participation can enhance mental health by offering adolescent girls positive feelings about body image, improved self-esteem, tangible experiences of competency and success, and increased self-confidence. Exercise can also help with academic achievement.
- Poverty substantially limits many girls' access to physical activity and sports, especially girls of color who are overrepresented in lower socioeconomic groups.

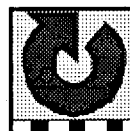
The report was made possible through the support of the Center for Mental Health Services, part of HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as part of the ***Girl Power!*** campaign, and the Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sports (CRGWS) at the University of Minnesota. Copies of the executive summary and full report are available on the Internet at www.coled.umn.edu/KLS/crgws and www.mentalhealth.org.

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The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Sport and Teen Pregnancy

Executive Summary



This study fills a major gap in research, revealing that sports may well be an untapped resource in the nation's struggle to prevent teen pregnancy. Many Americans believe that sports help to lower girls' risk for pregnancy. Parents breathe easier because their daughters are busy and chaperoned while attending after-school sports programs. Coaches tell stories about girls for whom the self-esteem supplied by sports helped ward off peer pressures to have sex. Some corporate advertisers point to sport as a key solution to the problem of teen pregnancy.

Despite such claims, however, researchers have failed to systematically investigate the connections between athletic participation and girls' risk for pregnancy (1). Moreover, only a handful of educational or community-based programs have used athletic participation as a strategic centerpiece for reducing teen pregnancy.

The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Sport and Teen Pregnancy opens a door for understanding the largely unexamined connections between athletic participation, sexual behavior and teen pregnancy. So that reliable research findings could be generated, the Women's Sports Foundation pooled funds with the Packard Foundation, the RGK Foundation, the Sara Lee

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Foundation, and the Turner Foundation in order to develop a comprehensive research design that tested whether athletic participation is tied to a reduced risk of teen pregnancy.

And what about boys? Are male athletes more or less likely than non-athletes to be involved with a pregnancy? Do boys learn lessons in the locker room that encourage them to "score" with girls and measure their masculine self-worth in terms of sexual conquest? Or are male athletes too caught up with training, discipline, and dreams of athletic success, too committed to a "clean body, clean mind" ethic to risk unprotected sex and consequent involvement with pregnancy? These questions remain unanswered, both because research on teen pregnancy and prevention programs has focused mainly on girls and because the role of sports in male sexual development has only recently begun to be studied. While the emphasis of this study is mainly on girls, we do include some findings that pertain to boys.

The findings and conclusions in this report were derived from the analyses of two different sources of data: 1) the Youth Risk Behavior Survey of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a nationally representative sample of 11,000 students in grades 9 through 12; and 2) the Family and Adolescent Study, a New York State Research Institute on Addiction study funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, which includes a representative household sample of adolescents from 699 families from Western New York. Our data analyses provided a comprehensive and reliable assessment of the influence of athletic participation on adolescent sexual behavior and pregnancy risk. Some racial and ethnic groups were not represented in large enough numbers for reliable statistical analyses to be done; e.g., Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders.

Some specific findings documented by this study include:

1. Female Athletes Were Less Likely to Get Pregnant

Female athletes in the nationwide survey were less than half as likely to get pregnant as female non-athletes (5% and 11%, respectively). Moreover, significantly reduced rates of pregnancy were found for the subsamples of African-American, Caucasian, and Latina/Hispanic female athletes.

2. Female Athletes Were More Likely to Be Virgins

Female athletes were significantly more likely to report

that they had never had sexual intercourse than female non-athletes. While 54% of the female athletes said they had never had sexual intercourse, 41% of the non-athletes reported the same.

3. Female Athletes Had Their First Intercourse Later in Adolescence

Female non-athletes were about twice as likely as female athletes to experience their first intercourse between the ages of 10 to 13 (15% and 8%, respectively in the nationwide survey, and 9% and 2% in the Western New York survey). The onset of coital activity was significantly later for female athletes than female non-athletes.

4. Female Athletes Had Sex Less Often

Female athletes in Western New York had sexual intercourse less frequently than female non-athletes. While less than a third of female athletes (30%) acknowledged having sexual intercourse four or more times during the past year, almost half of non-athletes (49%) did so.

5. Female Athletes Had Fewer Sex Partners

Female athletes had fewer sex partners than their non-athletic counterparts. While 29% of athletes in the nationwide survey said they had two or more partners during their lifetime, 37% of the non-athletes said so. The figures for the Western New York study were 24% and 39%, respectively.

6. Mixed Results for Male Athletes

Male athletes in Western New York experienced their first sexual intercourse earlier than male non-athletes. In the national study, African-American male athletes also experienced coital onset earlier than the non-athletes. However, no other consistent pattern of differences emerged between male athletes and non-athletes.

7. Athletes Are More Likely to Use Contraceptives

Among sexually active adolescents in the nationwide survey, both female athletes (87%) and male athletes (85%) reported higher rates of contraceptive use than their non-athletic counterparts. Specifically in regard to condom use, however, only female athletes were significantly more likely to report use than female non-athletes (53% and 41%, respectively).

Our results strongly suggest that, for girls, sports may be used as a developmental strategy in programs intended to

reduce teen pregnancy. In order to tap this potential, a Policy Advisory Panel was formed to draw up the policy recommendations included in this report.

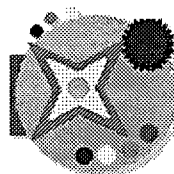
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GP! Sports & Fitness

Girl Power: There Are No Limits

Philadelphia Daily News

Tuesday, February 3, 1998

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Each year, the local branch of the Women's Sports Foundation sponsors an essay contest for girls in Philadelphia public and Catholic schools to get young women thinking about the role of sports in their lives. This year's topic was "There Are No Limits."

A Daily News salute to female Athletes

The four prize-winning essays are printed in this section.

- It was love, and still is, by Yvonne Anderson
- They fought and we won, by Alison Luberski
- Play is the way to win...respect, by Jamilla Blocker
- Don't Let labels foul your efforts, by Jamie Dunn

Here is a close-up look at talented young women being recognized for their athletic accomplishments by the Women's Sports Foundation.

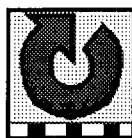
- **Nahara Rodriguez:** No accident could keep her out of the swim
- **Rashana Barnes:** From boards to books, a true all-rounder
- **Stephanie Moyerman:** She has all the right moves
- Six winning ways

[Girl Power! Tips](#) | [Girl Power! Diary](#) | [GirlSpeak!](#) | [Girl Power! Guests](#) | [Girl Power! Sports & Fitness](#) | [Endorser Spotlight](#) | [Games & Puzzles](#) | [What You've Said](#) | [Girl Power! Picks](#) | [Activity Book](#) | [Books 4 Girls!](#) | [Girl Power! Stuff](#) | [Girls At Work](#) | [What's New With Girl Power!](#) | [Girl Power! Scrapbook](#) | [For Girls! Locker](#) | [Girl Power! Homepage](#)

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AAUW's Initial Research

Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America

A nationwide poll of students ages 9-15, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* (1991) examines the impact of gender on self-esteem, career aspirations, educational experiences, and interest in math and science. The study found that as girls reach adolescence, they experience a significantly greater drop in self-esteem than boys experience. The poll also confirms a growing body of research that indicates girls are systematically, if unintentionally, discouraged from a wide range of academic pursuits--particularly in math and science. This gap in self-esteem and drop in girls' interest in math and science have devastating consequences for the future of girls and the future of the nation.

Produced in conjunction with the poll, AAUW's *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* video integrates poll results and the voices and faces of American girls with a roundtable of education experts and public policy leaders.

The poll inspired journalist Peggy Orenstein to write *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (1994), a moving portrait of adolescent girls at two California middle schools, one predominantly white and middle class, the other predominantly black and economically disadvantaged. *SchoolGirls* follows the girls through the school year, describing girls like Becca, who boasts she's a feminist but won't raise her hand in class for fear she'll give the wrong answer. The book is now in its third printing and is used as a textbook in some schools.

Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America, released in 1991 with an updated executive summary published in 1995, was commissioned by AAUW and researched by Greenberg-Lake: The Analysis Group.

To purchase copies of the *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* Executive Summary, the *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* video, or *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, see the AAUW Sales Catalog.

For more information about the *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* Executive Summary, the *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* video, or *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, send an e-mail to foundation@mail.aauw.org, call the Foundation INFOLINE at 202/728-7602 weekdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Eastern time), or write to:

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Washington, DC 20036

The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls

The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls (1992) is a startling examination of how girls in grades K-12 receive an inferior education to boys in America's schools. Among other results, the report reveals that girls receive less attention in the classroom than boys; girls are not pursuing math-related careers in proportion to boys; although the gender gap in math is shrinking, the gender gap in science is increasing; African American girls are more likely than white girls to be rebuffed by teachers; curricula ignore or stereotype women; reports of sexual harassment of girls are increasing; and many standardized tests contain elements of gender bias. These forms of gender bias undermine girls' self-esteem and discourage them from pursuing nontraditional courses of study, such as math and science. The report includes concrete strategies for change and recommendations for educators and policymakers.

Through a grant provided by the Ford Foundation, *The AAUW Report* has been translated into Chinese, Spanish, and French and was disseminated at the Nongovernmental Organizations Forum held in conjunction with the September 1995 U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China.

A paperback edition of *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls* was released in 1995 by Marlowe and Company, New York. The publication has an updated foreword and a new index.

Also available is *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls Executive Summary*, an overview of the full report with recommendations for change. For concrete strategies to combat gender bias in schools, see *The AAUW Report Action Guide*.

Commissioned by the AAUW Educational Foundation, *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls* was researched by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.

To purchase a copy of *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls*, *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls Executive Summary*, or *The AAUW Report Action Guide*, see the AAUW Sales Catalog.

For more information about *The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls*, send an e-mail to foundation@mail.aauw.org, call the Foundation INFOLINE at 202/728-7602 weekdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Eastern time), or write to:

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Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools

Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools (1993) represents the first national scientific study of sexual harassment in public schools. Based on the experiences of 1,632 students in grades 8 through 11, the research found that 85 percent of the girls and 76 percent of the boys surveyed have experienced sexual harassment. The survey also found that although both girls and boys experience sexual harassment at alarming rates, sexual harassment takes a greater toll on girls: girls who have been harassed are more afraid in school and feel less confident about themselves than boys who have been harassed; sexual harassment in school begins early; students are harassed by boys and girls; girls of all races experience more sexual harassment than do boys; African American boys are more likely to be harassed; and homophobia begins at an early age.

The study was commissioned by the AAUW Educational Foundation and conducted by Louis Harris and Associates.

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Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School

Released in October 1995, *Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School* gives educators, policymakers, parents, and students insights into strategies that foster girls' achievement and healthy development. A national review of more than 500 reports and studies on girls in grades K-12, *Growing Smart* offers compelling evidence that innovative approaches such as team learning, all-girls classes, and greater hands-on access to computers and tools benefit girls' ability to succeed in school. The publication includes a detailed summary of the researchers' data; action strategies for schools, families, and community leaders; and a resource list of programs nationwide with photos and firsthand accounts from program participants. While this study is about girls, it also addresses approaches that enhance school achievement and healthy development for boys.

The review was commissioned by the AAUW Educational Foundation and researched by Sunny Hansen, Joyce Walker, and Barbara Flom at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development.

The news release for *Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School* is available on this site.

To purchase a copy of *Growing Smart: What's Working for Girls in School*, see the AAUW Sales Catalog.

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AAUW Educational Foundation's Latest Research Initiative

New! Girls in the Middle: Working to Succeed in School (1996)

Released in September 1996, this intriguing report and companion video show how adolescent girls, regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or region of the country, use a common set of behavioral strategies to meet the challenges of middle school. Girls try out these behaviors in a vital but often-misunderstood identity-making process, shifting strategies to fit changing circumstances. No single strategy works all the time, and all have risks.

Enter the world of middle school and see how girls use different strategies to meet the competing demands of school, community, and peers. Learn how parents, administrators, and teachers can foster girls' growth by encouraging them to experiment with the full range of strategies.

Among the most common strategies are:

Speaking out. When girls speak out, they tend to make their opinions heard at home, at school, and in the community. They are often highly visible in their schools and publicly acknowledged as leaders. However, in some circumstances, girls who speak out risk being labeled as troublemakers.

Doing school. When girls "do school," they often complete their work on time, listen in class, and meet adults' expectations, which may lead to good grades and academic success. On the other hand, doing school may result in suppressed potential.

Crossing borders. When girls cross borders, they tend to move easily between different cultures or sets of norms and expectations, bridging the gap between peers and adults or between different racial or ethnic groups. This skill makes them good communicators and mediators. However, being a go-between may be a heavy responsibility at times.

Girls in the Middle links girls' success to school reforms like team teaching and cooperative learning, especially where these are used to address gender issues. Reforms that match students with caring adults and confront such real student concerns as violence, pregnancy, and social norms benefit boys as well as girls.

Commissioned by the AAUW Educational Foundation, this qualitative study was conducted by Research for Action, Inc. and written by Jody Cohen and Sukey Blanc, with Jolley Christman, Diane Brown, and Michelle Sims.

The news release for *Girls in the Middle: Working to Succeed in School* is available on this site.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, Nov. 23, 1998

Contact: Mark Weber (SAMHSA) (301) 443-8956

2ND ANNIVERSARY OF GIRL POWER! CAMPAIGN

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<http://www.health.org/gpower>

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Note: HHS press releases are available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.hhs.gov>.



The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report

Physical Activity & Sport in the Lives of Girls



Physical & Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach

**Under the Direction of
The Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport
University of Minnesota**

**Supported By
The Center for Mental Health Services /
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Spring 1997

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Message from Donna E. Shalala

Secretary of Health and Human Services

The year 1996 marked a breakthrough in our understanding of the benefits of physical activity and health for all Americans. With the publication of the first Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, we have clearly documented the fact that men and women of all ages can improve the quality of their lives through a lifelong practice of regular moderate physical activity. And the research indicates that physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve real health benefits. A regular, preferably daily routine of at least 30-45 minutes of brisk walking, bicycling, or even dancing will

reduce the risks of developing coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes. Moreover, regular physical activity can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety; help control weight; and help build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.

Childhood and adolescence are critical times to lay the foundation for lifelong physical activity, but, unfortunately, too many young people, especially girls, are not active enough. As children grow into adolescence, their participation in physical activity declines dramatically. As the Surgeon General's report tells us, almost half our young people aged 12 to 21 are not vigorously active on a regular basis and 14 percent are completely inactive. And young females are twice as likely to be inactive as young males.

These are dangerous trends, and we need to change them. Fortunately, this landmark report on Physical Activity & Sport in the Lives of Girls from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports tells us some of the steps we can take to enable girls to reach their full potential. It tells us that we need to provide more quality school-based physical education for girls. It tells us that we need to encourage girls to get involved in sport and physical activity at an early age. It tells us that we need to challenge stereotypes that impede girls' participation in sports. And it tells us that we have made progress in some areas. For example, the Title IX legislation enacted in 1972 has opened the doors for millions of girls to participate in school sports.

Americans took enormous pride in the accomplishments of the 1996 Olympic gold medal female athletes in soccer, softball, swimming, track and field, gymnastics, basketball, and other sports. We need to build on that spirit and develop a national commitment to ensure that every girl receives the encouragement, training, and support she needs to develop and maintain an active lifestyle. Increasing physical activity among girls is a formidable public health challenge, but the potential rewards are great: a more vigorous nation, better health and greater leadership opportunities for girls, prevention of premature death and unnecessary illness, and a higher quality of life for our citizens. I strongly encourage all Americans to join us in this effort.

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Message from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

In the summer of 1996, our nation cheered the performance and achievements of the U.S. women Olympians and Paralympians. The images of strong, active women were inspiring, a long way from the days when females were relegated to "lady-like" sports and young girls were left on the sidelines as their brothers played.

Following on the heels of the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, this landmark review makes clear that participation in physical activity and sport can help girls weather the storms of adolescence and lay the foundation for a healthier adult life. The report looks at "the complete girl" through an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the impact of physical activity and sport participation.

The conclusions are striking: regular physical activity can reduce girls' risk of many of the chronic diseases of adulthood; female athletes do better academically and have lower school drop-out rates than their nonathletic counterparts; and, regular physical activity can enhance girls' mental health, reducing symptoms of stress and depression and improving self-esteem.

But further vigilance and research are needed to ensure that all girls and boys can experience these same benefits. While Title IX has a tremendous impact on expanding physical activity opportunities for females, its compliance and enforcement have often wavered. Parents, teachers, and coaches should be

encouraged to challenge stereotypes about girls' participation in physical activity and sport. There is a lack of information and research about how race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status might affect girls' sport and fitness involvement.

I greatly appreciate the support of the Members of the President's Council for this endeavor, which stemmed from the Council's Task Force on Girls and Minorities. Their enthusiasm and unflinching support for expanding the reach of the PCPFS into important areas such as this have been critical to the successful completion of this important project.

Council Member Deborah Slaner Larkin deserves special recognition for her vision and commitment to this report and for her many years of leadership in promoting opportunities in physical activity and sports for girls and women.

I would like to thank the Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, under the able leadership of Dr. Mary Jo Kane, and the Center for Mental Health Services, our partners in this endeavor.

It is my hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for parents, coaches, educators, researchers, and community leaders to encourage and create opportunities for girls and young women to become--and remain--more physically active throughout their lives.

Sandra Perlmutter
Executive Director

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Letter from the Project Directors

Dear reader:

On behalf of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, we are honored to present this research report. All of us who have been involved with the project have a great respect for the power that sport and physical activity can wield. Such involvement has helped shape our lives. In fact, it is a major reason why many of us have chosen this area as our life's work.

Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach was created to highlight the multiplicity of ways in which physical activity and sport have become an integral part of girls' lives. It examines the benefits girls derive from participation in physical activity and sport; the barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential; and the kinds of environments in which girls learn how to develop and foster the best parts of themselves both on and off the playing fields. The report was also created to develop future research paths and policy recommendations as a guide for planning and programming.

This is a groundbreaking report because it marks the first time an interdisciplinary approach has been used in a government document that examines the impact of sport and physical activity in the lives of girls. We have chosen authors who are experts in the physiological, sociological, psychological and mental health fields to each write a section discussing significant issues in their respective academic areas. The interdisciplinary approach is particularly important because it enables us to talk about the "complete girl"--her social, physical, emotional and cultural environment--rather than just one aspect of a girl's experience. It should be noted that, on occasion within the report, the authors present differing points of view with respect to certain research findings. For example, scientific studies in the mental health field may suggest a particular relationship between self-esteem and physical activity that has not been identified in the area of sport sociology. This should not be interpreted as problematic or contradictory; instead, it can be viewed as an opportunity for further discussion and for reinforcement of the need for future interdisciplinary research. Finally, one strength of this report is a reference list that

includes numerous citations from a variety of academic disciplines. Such a list can be an invaluable resource for academics, educators and practitioners.

Related to the issue of interdisciplinarity, you will find when reading the report that different authors use different terminology when talking about girls. As a general rule, however, the word "girl" is used when authors are referring to girls 18 and under. Other terminology is used to further delineate age. For example, "adolescent female" typically refers to girls between the ages of 13-18, while "young girl" generally signifies 11 and under.

While the amount of research covered in this report is thorough and in-depth, because of space limitations, we could not include every aspect of what is known about the many ways in which sport and physical activity influence girls. We also addressed many issues related to diversity such as cultural or racial heritage and different physical abilities. However, what is clear from the authors' findings is that we have a great deal more to learn about the particular ways in which involvement in sport and physical activity affects minority groups of girls. We urge others to use this document as a way to pursue future areas of research; many potential directions are outlined in detail in the authors' research sections.

It is important that the information presented in this document reaches a variety of audiences from parents, teachers and coaches to administrators and policy makers in educational institutions and government agencies. Everyone involved in the lives of our children needs to know what factors contribute to girls' development. Our hope is that those most able to effect change will use this information as a vehicle for pursuing future areas of research and developing and implementing programs that will make a difference in one of this country's most important assets--girls.

Finally, this report is dedicated to all of the parents, physical education teachers, coaches and athletic administrators who recognize the importance of sport and physical activity for all girls. These hard-working individuals spend their days on the ball fields and playgrounds teaching skills and developing a young girl's character. They are on the phone at night organizing the next game, event or season. Their weekends are often spent at meetings and conferences. They fight for Title IX compliance, coverage of a game or a walkathon in the local paper, new uniforms, adequate facilities and safe fields. Without their commitment and dedication to bettering the lives of girls throughout this country, this report would not have been possible. We are all in their debt!

Mary Jo Kane
Project Director

Deborah Slaner Larkin
Project Director

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Acknowledgments

THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS AND SPORTS (PCPFS) *serves as a catalyst to promote, encourage and motivate the development of physical activity, fitness and sports participation for all Americans of all ages. Established by Executive Order in 1956, the PCPFS is made up of twenty members appointed by the President. Assisted by elements of the United States Office of Public Health and Science, the PCPFS provides guidance to the President and the Secretary of Health and Human Services on how to get more Americans physically active.*

THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON GIRLS & WOMEN IN SPORT (CRGWS) is dedicated to examining how sport and physical activity impact the lives of young girls and women. The first of its

kind in the country, the CRGWS is an interdisciplinary research center leading a pioneering effort on significant social and educational issues. The CRGWS is equally committed to teaching and mentoring students and to community outreach and public service.

THE CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides national leadership for improving the quality and availability of treatment and prevention services for mental illness, particularly with respect to adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbances.

This comprehensive report is funded by the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Project Directors are grateful to the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for their support in making this study possible. It will enable us to provide information to educators and decision makers who are in a position to make a difference in the lives of girls across the country.

Special Thanks

Appreciation is extended to the following individuals, all of whom have made a significant contribution to the preparation of this report: Leslie Fisher, Ph.D. (*University of Virginia*); Darlene Kluka (*Oklahoma State University*); Judy Mahle Lutter, President (*Melpomene Institute, St. Paul MN*); Gloria Solomon, Ph.D., (*Texas Christian University*); Diane Wakat, President (*Intelligent Nutrition Systems, Charlottesville VA*); Art Weltman, Ph.D. (*University of Virginia*); Jennifer Fiedelholz, M.P.P., Acting Associate Administrator (*Office of Women's Services/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*); Nance Longley, Publications Designer/Production Assistant (*College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota*); Debra Haessly, Executive Assistant (*School of Kinesiology and Leisure Studies, University of Minnesota*); Shelly Shaffer, Ph.D. (*Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, University of Minnesota*); LeeAnn Krieger, M.A. (*Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, University of Minnesota*); Jonathan Sweet, Executive Assistant (*Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, University of Minnesota*); Janet Spector, Associate Professor (*Departments of Anthropology and Women's Studies, University of Minnesota*); Bernard S. Arons, M.D., Director (*Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*); Layne Owens, Special Assistant to the Executive Director (*President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports*).

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Summary

THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS AND SPORTS (PCPFS) serves as a catalyst to promote, encourage and motivate the development of physical activity, fitness and sport participation for all Americans. This report expresses the PCPFS's mission to inform the general public of the importance of developing and maintaining physical activity and fitness in our daily lives, and to heighten awareness of the links that exist between regular physical activity and good health. In the past, involvement in sport and physical activity has been primarily associated with males. Over the past two decades, however, girls' and women's involvement in such activity has increased dramatically. This is in large part due to the impact of Title IX, federal legislation passed in 1972 designed to prohibit sex discrimination in educational settings. For example, prior to Title IX, 300,000 young women participated in interscholastic athletics nationwide; today, that figure has leaped to approximately 2.25 million participants. In the wake of this participation explosion, scholars and educators have begun to explore its impact on girls and women.

Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach was created in order to highlight relevant research and draw on expert

opinion regarding girls' involvement in physical activity and sport. This is the first report that brings together research findings--and practical suggestions for implementing these findings--from three interdisciplinary bodies of knowledge: physiological, psychological and sociological. An additional section explores the relationships among physical activity, sport and the mental health of girls. The primary goal was to identify and discuss the beneficial ways that physical activity and sport influence girls' physical health, psychological well-being and overall social and educational development. An additional goal was to identify the problematic aspects of girls' involvement. These include, but are not limited to, eating disorders, gender stereotyping and institutional barriers such as lack of opportunity and access to various resources. Although this report examines some of the most current and cutting-edge issues, because of space limitations, the authors do not claim to include all relevant research and concerns surrounding girls' involvement with sport and physical activity.

The report focuses on girls and not boys (other than for comparison where appropriate) for several reasons. First, with respect to sport and physical activity, girls have been neglected by researchers in the biomedical sciences, education, physical education and the social sciences. Second, though girls and boys share common experiences, girls also exhibit unique physiological, emotional and social outcomes that merit special investigation. Next, scholars need to keep pace with the aforementioned explosion and diversification of girls' involvement with sport and physical activity in the wake of Title IX. And finally, researchers increasingly recognize that the social world of physical activity and sport is not a one-dimensional universe, but a highly complex set of institutions populated by two genders with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, cultural values, physical abilities and sexual orientations.

Public apathy about physical education, and the glitzy distractions of commercialized sports in mass media, sometimes hide the basic fact that physical activity is a public health resource for millions of American girls as well as their families and communities. In order to advance knowledge regarding the real and potential contributions of physical activity and sport in the lives of millions of girls, several areas for future research are highlighted by the authors at the end of each section. Finally, a set of policy recommendations is also included in order to encourage responsible action on the part of parents, coaches, educators, sport leaders and elected officials. With such a "teamwork" approach, we can make a difference in the lives of girls.

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Key Research Findings

Some of the most important research findings documented and highlighted in this report suggest that:

- More girls are participating in a wider array of physical activities and sports than ever before in American history. (Introduction)
- Regular physical activity in adolescence can reduce girls' risk for obesity and hyperlipidemia (i.e., high levels of fat in the blood) which, in turn, have been known to be associated with lower adult onset of coronary heart disease and certain cancers. Regular physical activity can also help girls build greater peak bone mass, thereby reducing adult risk for osteoporosis. (Research Report, Section I)
- Exercise and sport participation can be used as a therapeutic and preventative intervention for enhancing the physical and mental health of adolescent females. (Research Report, Section IV)
- Exercise and sport participation can enhance mental health by offering adolescent girls positive feelings about body image, improved self-esteem, tangible experiences of competency and success and increased self-confidence. (Research Report, Sections II and IV)
- Research suggests that physical activity is an effective tool for reducing the symptoms of stress and depression among girls. (Research Report, Sections II and IV)
- Sports are an educational asset in girls' lives. Research findings show that many high-school female athletes report higher grades and standardized test scores and lower dropout rates, and are more likely to go on to college than their nonathletic counterparts. (Research Report, Section III)
- Recognition of physical activity and sport as an effective and money-saving public health asset is growing among researchers and policy makers. (Introduction; Research Report, Sections I, II and IV)

- Poverty substantially limits many girls' access to physical activity and sport, especially girls of color who are overrepresented in lower socioeconomic groups. (Introduction; Research Report, Section III)
- Excessive exercise and certain forms of athletic participation have been found to be associated with a higher prevalence of eating disorders. (Research Report, Sections I, II, III and IV)
- The potential for some girls to derive positive experiences from physical activity and sport is marred by lack of opportunity, gender stereotypes and homophobia. (Research Report, Sections III and IV)

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Conclusions and Recommendations

A summary of some of the most important conclusions and practical recommendations discussed in this report suggest that:

- Girls should be encouraged to get involved in sport and physical activity at an early age because such involvement reduces the likelihood of developing a number of deleterious health-related conditions. For example, active girls' high caloric expenditure decreases their risk of becoming obese. (Introduction; Research Report, Section I)
- Specific mechanisms which enhance girls' opportunities to be physically active must be developed and supported. Recreational, school-based physical education and sport programs are ideal ways to facilitate both health-related fitness and the acquisition of fundamental motor skills for a lifetime of activity. (Research Report, Section I)
- Involvement in sport and physical activity has tremendous potential to enhance a girl's sense of competence and control. Therefore, leaders should incorporate cooperative as well as competitive opportunities to learn physical skills in a nonthreatening environment. (Research Report, Sections II and III)
- Parents, coaches and teachers must be aware of girls' motives for participating in sport and physical activity. Girls participate not only for competitive reasons, but to get in shape, socialize, improve skills and have fun. All motives, not just those related to highly competitive activity, must be respected and validated. (Research Report, Sections II and III)
- Physical educators, exercise leaders and coaches are in a primary position to recognize disordered eating patterns among girls. These individuals must be knowledgeable about the physical and psychological signs and be able to make referrals to specialists as necessary. (Research Report, Section II)
- Girls and boys need to work and play together, starting from an early age. It is often easier for both sexes to play together and learn in small, relaxed groups where children know each other well and have the prerequisite skills. (Research Report, Section III)
- Coaches and physical educators should give girls equal access and attention. Girls as well as boys should play the important and interesting positions in a game and receive feedback to help improve their physical skills. (Research Report, Section III)
- Professionals must actively intervene in the face of discrimination. When adults observe inequities or gender stereotyping on the playing field or in the physical education classroom, it is often best to openly confront issues of prejudice such as sexism. (Research Report, Section III)
- Involvement in physical activity, exercise and sport promotes psychological well-being; the therapeutic use of physical activity and exercise for improving the mental health of adolescent girls goes beyond traditional treatment and mental health programs. (Research Report, Section IV)
- Physical activity and exercise have been shown to be a mood enhancer and an anxiety reducer, thereby acting as a natural, cost-effective intervention for the mental health of adolescent girls. (Introduction; Research Report, Sections II and IV)

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Directions for Future Research

Because of the importance of sport and physical activity in the lives of girls, it is incumbent for us to

continue to expand our scientific knowledge base regarding the physiological, psychological, sociological and mental health consequences of participation in these activities. A summary of some of the most important directions and agendas for future research suggests that:

- **Research studies must be conducted** to develop and implement motivational strategies encouraging physical activity during childhood and into adulthood. (Research Report, Section I)
- **Research should establish guidelines** for appropriate training levels. When establishing these guidelines, scholars should consider areas that are particularly critical for girls, such as the prevalence of overuse injuries and issues related to body composition. For example, specific guidelines for appropriate activity levels can prevent injuries due to excessive training and/or early specialization in one sport. Knowledge regarding appropriate levels of training can also minimize an undue focus on body composition (e.g., body image) that can lead to exercise addiction. (Research Report, Sections I and II)
- **Research studies need to be designed** that better distinguish between sport-specific or sport-general dropouts--versus sport transfers--to ascertain if girls are leaving organized sport entirely or simply sampling a variety of sporting activities. These investigations should collect and analyze participation statistics and conduct exit interviews with children who drop out in order to identify negative reasons for cessation and address them in future programs. (Research Report, Section II)
- **We need to increase our research agenda** to be more inclusive. For example, future research must be expanded beyond an analysis of highly competitive sport to include a broader range of activities (e.g., personal fitness) and settings (e.g., physical education classrooms). Additionally, studies should include participants from racially, ethnically, economically and ability-diverse backgrounds because gender interacts with these diversities in complex ways (Gill, 1993). (Research Report, Sections II, III and IV)
- **Research studies must utilize** an interdisciplinary perspective. For example, we need to adopt a biopsychosocial perspective that takes into account physical, psychological and social context variables simultaneously. We also need to develop "research teams" that enhance partnerships between scholars and practitioners. (Research Report, Sections II and IV)
- **Future research should be guided** by the principle that strategies for improving participation rates must also address the quality of the sport and physical activity experience for girls. (Research Report, Section III)
- **Scientific studies should identify** which factors influence exercise as treatment interventions. When using exercise as a treatment intervention to restore mental health for adolescent girls, we need to examine the impact of peer (same-sex and cross-sex) influences and individual versus group approaches. (Research Report, Section IV)

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Overview of the Report

For a complete list of the citations in this Overview, see the References section.

WHEN THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS AND SPORTS was established by Executive Order in 1956, few Americans could have imagined the surge of participation in physical activity and sport among girls and women over the last two decades. Millions of girls now participate in a rapidly expanding variety of physical activities, and female athletes perform feats that once were deemed physiologically impossible. Despite the startling speed of these recent changes, however, the explosion of women's participation and ability is more accurately viewed as an acceleration of a centuries-long march toward greater physical freedom and athletic excellence.

During the nineteenth century, health reformers and educators included "female gymnastics," walking, riding and dancing as key components of young women's education (Vertinsky, 1994). In the countryside and towns, archery, tennis, bicycling, ice boating, roller skating, croquet, golf and dance became popular among girls and women. A "new model of able-bodied womanhood" emerged, which

challenged traditional notions about female frailty and ladylike behavior (Verbrugge, 1988, p. 196). The integration of exercise and athletic activity into school curricula expanded during the twentieth century. Recreational athletics for girls became popular in the form of "play days" between 1920 and 1950 and competitive varsity sports such as basketball and track and field multiplied after World War II (Hult, 1994). The passage of Title IX in 1972 ushered in an era of coed physical education and greater opportunities for girls to play high school and college sports. The fitness revolution also grabbed the attention and allegiance of millions of girls and women during the 1970s and 1980s.

Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach presents an interdisciplinary portrayal of the connections among the physical, psychological, social and cultural aspects of physical activity and sport in girls' lives. When viewed collectively, the research findings discussed here show how physical activity and sport impact the "complete girl": that is, the many interrelated aspects of a girl's life ranging from musculoskeletal and cardiovascular functioning, to psychological well-being, gender identity, relationships with friends and family and performance in school. Physical activity and sport offer girls more than gateways to fun, competition or an elevated heart rate. While the authors of this report are aware that girls' experiences vary a great deal, the vision of the complete girl fosters a comprehensive awareness that exercise and sport are not just about physical movement but personal development, identity and values as well.

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Participation, Opportunity and Barriers

American girls now participate in a wider range of physical activities and sports, and at more levels of competition, than ever before in our history. While Oregon girls learn to square their shoulders to the volleyball net, a group of girls play "four squares" in rural New Hampshire, an Arkansas teenager teaches hopscotch to her little sister, and Native American teenagers meet for lacrosse practice. As girls bounce and chatter through double-dutch jump rope in Bedford-Stuyvesant, in-line skaters glide through a Houston suburb. As an Ohio high school basketball team runs through drills, friends from DeKalb, Illinois, meet for an aerobics class. And women give gutsy performances while winning gold medals at the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in sports ranging from softball, soccer and basketball to gymnastics, track and field and swimming.

Females have become prime movers in the fitness realm. A recent nationwide survey conducted by the National Sporting Goods Association indicated that more women (55.4 million) than men (43.4 million) participate in several leading fitness activities--aerobic exercising, bicycling, exercising with equipment, exercise walking, running and swimming. A more specific breakdown reveals that an estimated 18.3 million women do aerobics, 26.5 million bike for exercise or mountain bike, 23.8 million exercise with weights, 45.2 million walk, 8.65 million run or jog and 32.6 million swim (National Sporting Goods Association, 1995).

Girls' participation in school athletic programs and community-based programs is also mushrooming. Girls now comprise about 37 percent of all high-school athletes, representing an increase from one in 27 girls who participated in 1971 to one in three girls in 1994. The ratio for boys during this timeframe remained constant at one in two. In 1994-1995, 2,240,000 girls participated in high-school sports, compared to 3,554,429 boys, 37 percent and 63 percent respectively (National Federation of State High Schools Associations, 1995-1996). In terms of some specific sports, an estimated eight million girls under age 17 played basketball in 1994 (compared to 12.5 million boys) while 6.7 million girls played soccer. As more girls developed athletic interests and physical skills at the grassroots levels of competition during the 1970s and 1980s, participation in college and Olympic sports also exploded. Women now comprise 33 percent of all college athletes and approximately 39 percent of United States Olympic team members. Reciprocally, as more female role models become available for young girls to emulate, their interest and involvement in fitness and athletic activities will continue to grow.

Despite these gains, it is important to realize that women's historical trek toward greater physical and athletic opportunity has been filled with barriers. In the past, various individuals have condemned exercise and sport as unladylike and eminent physicians warned women against overstrain and sterility.

One of the authors of this report, sport sociologist Margaret Carlisle Duncan, points out that stereotypes associated with traditional notions of femininity and masculinity exalted boys' strength and athletic feats while equating girls' athletic talents with "tomboyism." Parents, coaches and teachers often encouraged boys to test their physical and emotional limits while ignoring or coddling girls.

Today, girls' achievements in physical activity and sport remain overshadowed by the cultural prominence of men's sports. In school and community-based programs, boys still receive a disproportionate share of opportunities to participate in exercise and sport. Male-dominated sports organizations remain mired in policies and beliefs that shortchange girls and women, and parents or advocates of girls are forced to wage expensive legal battles in the pursuit of gender equity. Indeed, it is unlikely that the large increase in girls' athletic participation and growing cultural acceptance of physically active and athletic females would have occurred without the passage of Title IX (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Cahn, 1994a; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Pressured by the perceived threat of lawsuits or payment of legal fees, and pulled by increasing demands for greater opportunity for girls, Parent Teacher Associations and school administrators began to rethink traditional cliches like "girls just aren't as physical as boys" or "sports are more important for boys than for girls."

Harsh economic conditions, prejudice and institutional barriers have limited the participation of many poor girls, girls of color and girls with disabilities.

And finally, harsh economic conditions, prejudice and institutional barriers have limited the participation of many poor girls, girls of color and girls with disabilities. Ironically, where the real and potential health outcomes of physical activity and sport are probably most needed, participation rates and access to resources are most lacking. As the authors of this report repeatedly document, girls' increasing participation and interest in physical activity and sport bode well for their health. Yet these positive national trends are being undermined by the growing numbers of adolescents who are becoming sedentary and obese, the substantial numbers of girls who are dropping out of sports, and the persistence of social and economic barriers that limit girls' opportunities to develop physically active lifestyles.

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Understanding the Complete Girl

Physical activity and sport are not simply things young girls do *in addition to* the rest of their lives, but rather, they comprise an interdependent set of physiological, psychological and social processes that can influence, and, in varying degrees, sustain girls' growth and development. The interdisciplinary approach that underpins this report is designed to make more visible some of the connections among physical activity, sport and the rest of girls' lives. Some examples of the broader linkages that are examined in the body of this report are highlighted below.

Psychological Well-Being

Within the traditional framework of psychoanalytic theory, nonconformity to traditional gender expectations was considered pathological. Hence, women's interest and involvement in business, science, sport or other "masculine" activities were clinically suspect. In contrast, the review of psychological research presented in this report shows that physical activity and sport are apt to strengthen rather than worsen the psychological health of girls. The authors document a combination of psychosocial benefits such as self-confidence, self-esteem, higher energy levels and positive body image. It is important to note that these gains appear to be influenced by interactions with parents, who can either encourage or dampen a daughter's interest and involvement. So, too, do persistent and narrow cultural prescriptions for appropriately "feminine" behavior erode the potential of physical activity and sport to enhance girls' mental health. On the other end of the interdisciplinary spectrum, some of the

biological and chemical processes associated with health and fitness concerns are also highlighted. And finally, two of the authors of this report, psychology of sport scholars Doreen Greenberg and Carole Oglesby, discuss the growing recognition among mental health professionals that exercise and sport can be effective treatment interventions for the significant number of girls who suffer from depression or anxiety disorders.

Obesity

The Surgeon General's report on nutrition and health (Public Health Service, 1988) identified obesity as a major public health problem in the United States; subsequently, the Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1996) identified physical inactivity as a serious public health problem nationwide. Aware of this concern, the authors of this report discuss a variety of factors associated with the rising rate of obesity among American adolescents. Social factors include the influence of television, dwindling requirements for physical education in the schools, and the steep sport dropout rate among adolescents. Related to physical health concerns, this report explores the physiological and epidemiological aspects of obesity such as the links between the development of hyperlipidemia, hypercholesterolemia, hypertension and diabetes, which in turn elevate risk for coronary heart disease. Finally, in her section on the psychological dimensions of participation, psychology of sport scholar Diane Wiese-Bjornstal stresses the need to help overweight or obese girls overcome social pressures and personal misgivings about physical activity so that they can become less sedentary.

The Female Athlete Triad

Several authors discuss the complex combination of psychological and physiological processes that operate in relation to the female athlete triad. In Section I, exercise physiologist Patty Freedson and psychology of sport scholar Linda Bunker document many physiological benefits of exercise and sport participation for girls such as potential gains in strength and aerobic power. It also appears promising that girls' involvement in sport and exercise could effect increased immune functioning and the prevention of certain cancers in adult life. They also express their concerns about the "female athlete triad," which refers to three interrelated health problems that are prevalent among some types of female athletes and some girls who engage in excessive exercise: eating disorders, exercise-induced amenorrhea and bone loss. Several authors demonstrate how these syndromes have complex psychological, physiological and social origins and profiles. For example, girls' perceptions of their bodies are partly shaped by unrealistic media images that create false connections between a lean body type or "washboard abs" and subsequent success, sex appeal and self-mastery. The obsession with thinness can also be fed by a coach who demands weight loss from the athlete, or the desire to be attractive to boys and accepted by one's peers. Because we are in the early stages of investigating this syndrome, the data we have are very limited. Female athletes most at risk should certainly be aware of the dangers, but we should not assume that the triad is limited to an athletic population (Lutter & Jaffee, 1996).

*On average, female athletes fare better
academically than their nonathletic
counterparts.*

Sport and Academic Achievement

It is said that "the fish are the last ones to discover the ocean." In Section III, Margaret Carlisle Duncan illustrates how several research findings debunk the "dumb jock" stereotype that high school athletes perform poorly in the classroom. School administrators are often unaware of the positive interplay between high-school athletics and academic achievement as measured by grade point average, standardized achievement test scores, lowered risk for dropout and greater likelihood to attend college. On average, female athletes fare better academically than female nonathletes, though Caucasian and Hispanic female athletes are more apt to derive some direct educational gains than are their African-American counterparts ("Women's Sports Foundation Report: Minorities in Sport," 1989). Good

physical and mental health are also correlates of academic performance and social adjustment. Hence, from an interdisciplinary perspective, it is likely that athletic participation is part of a mutually reinforcing array of physical, psychological and social processes that enhance the overall educational experiences and commitments of many girls.

In summary, understanding the role of physical activity and sport in the life of the "complete girl" is a dauntingly complex agenda. The mosaic of interdisciplinary findings and interpretations assembled in this report will deepen both insight and resolve in this regard.

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Poverty, Race and Physical Ability

Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, girls of color and girls with disabilities can face unique obstacles in relation to physical activity and sport. Poor families cannot afford to invest in health club memberships, exercise machines and equipment for their daughters. Families of color, who are disproportionately poor, often cannot pay user fees or transportation costs to bring daughters back and forth between home and school. Fitness and sport are often seen as unattainable luxuries rather than potential resources. Dual-worker parents or single parents (most often mothers) sometimes depend on older daughters to cook or care for smaller children after school, thus curbing their involvement with extracurricular activities. Poor or working-class girls often work part-time jobs to help families make ends meet, thereby reducing the amount of time and energy available for exercise or sports. Parental perceptions of the benefits of exercise and athletic participation for daughters also vary by race and class. For example, one national survey found that Caucasian parents more often mentioned health-related benefits, character benefits and social factors than did African-American parents ("The Wilson Report: Moms, Dads, Daughters and Sports," 1988).

*Little is known about the dreams, interests
and physical activities of girls of color.*

Many of the problems girls of color experience in relation to physical activity and sport grow out of the same soil--poverty. Epidemiological research shows that exposure to violence, family fragmentation, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and greater risk for unwanted sexual activity often share the common causality of poverty. Lack of physical activity and athletic opportunity can be added to this list. Economically disadvantaged girls of color are more likely to suffer from an unsafe and unhealthy environment. The simple act of walking or jogging may be problematic in neighborhoods where crime flourishes. Poor girls often do not have access to athletic resources, effective coaching and expert training. There is a lack of basic information about exercise, diet and sport. They are less apt to receive quality physical education and athletic training at earlier ages which, in turn, erodes the foundation for subsequent motor development. Because school and community athletic programs depend on tax dollars to thrive, capital flight from many urban areas is undermining the provision of adequate exercise and athletic opportunities for both minority girls and boys. The rising cost of liability insurance is also making it difficult for school districts, especially poorer ones, to provide quality athletic and intramural programs.

Little is known about the dreams, interests and physical activities of girls of color. Although women of color are often more visible in sport media, and in certain sports like basketball and track and field, they are underrepresented in sports such as swimming and tennis (Abney & Richey, 1992). During the early 1980s, African-American and Hispanic adolescent females comprised about 4.4 percent and 3.2 percent of high school athletes respectively, compared to 29.1 percent of their Caucasian counterparts (Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992). There is also indirect evidence that African-American and other ethnic minority females are less physically active than Caucasian females (King et al., 1992; Pate et al., 1995).

And finally, despite the accomplishments of the Special Olympics and Paralympics, few opportunities exist for emotionally or physically challenged adolescents to engage in exercise and sport. Differently-abled children are three times more likely to be sedentary than their able-bodied peers and the physical activity levels of children with disabilities drop precipitously during adolescence (Longmuir & Bar-Or, 1994). It should be noted that the authors of this report make only periodic references to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and physical disability. This is due not so much to choice, however, as to the fact that so little research has focused on these groups of girls.

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What Researchers Don't Know Can Hurt Girls

This report is the first to assemble the bulk of existing research on girls' involvement with physical activity and sport. However, because of the lack of available data and analysis, the authors of this report were unable to address in any depth some key aspects of girls' experiences with physical activity and sport. Three emerging research concerns are briefly discussed below.

Unwanted Sexual Behavior and Adolescent Pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancy is a major social problem in the United States. Though the belief that sports can help many young girls avoid unwanted sexual behavior and pregnancy is widespread among coaches and athletes, precious little research has been done in this area (Sabo & Melnick, 1996). Two recent studies shed some initial empirical light on the hypothesized connections among exercise, athletics and adolescent girls' sexual behavior. First, Brown, Ellis, Guerrina, Paxton and Poleno (1996) analyzed female adolescents' responses to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1995) survey, "Health Risk Behavior for the Nation's Youth." The researchers found that the more days adolescent females exercised per week, the more likely they were to postpone their first experience with sexual intercourse. Second, preliminary analysis from a study of adolescents from western New York (an area with one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in the United States) indicated that higher rates of athletic participation among adolescent females were significantly associated with lower rates of both sexual activity and pregnancy (Sabo, Farrell, Melnick, & Barnes, 1996).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is experienced by approximately 31 percent of female high school students (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation [AAUW], 1993). Sport scholars have recently begun to study the prevalence and social-psychological dynamics of sexual harassment in athletic settings (Sabo & Oglesby, 1995). Many key questions need to be addressed. For example, how do female athletes perceive and react to sexual harassment from boys and adults? Do higher self-esteem and physical prowess fostered by sports help females to be more assertive with inappropriately invasive males than their non-athletic counterparts? Additional research needs to be done on the ways that athletic participation may empower girls to more effectively cope with sexually hostile situations.

Exercise and Sport as a Family Asset

In what ways can parents effectively encourage their daughters' involvement with physical activity and sport?

Regretfully, little research has focused on the ways that exercise and sport promote interaction and insight between parents and children. As is the case with sexual harassment, many important questions in this area remain unanswered. Do parents look to sport to provide after-school activities that keep daughters physically active, socially engaged and off the streets? To what extent do physical activity and

sport help parents nurture moral development and values in their children? In what ways can parents effectively encourage their daughters' involvement with physical activity and sport? Clearly, more investigation of the interdependencies among physical activity, sport, families and schools is needed.

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Conclusion: Expanding the Resource

This report will fuel the growing awareness that physical activity and sport are enormously important in the lives of girls. Perhaps this message is being sent by girls themselves who are, as the saying goes, "voting with their feet," and entering the realms of fitness and sport in vastly increasing numbers. In contrast to the nineteenth century naysayers who decried strenuous exercise and athletic participation for women as dangerous and unladylike, today, educators and public health advocates recognize the overall benefits for girls' physical health and emotional well-being. As health care costs continue to escalate, and pressures on the American health care system to provide quality care intensify, the logic of preventive health strategies that involve physical activity and sport becomes economically salient.

The overall vision that emerges from this report frames physical activity as a developmental aid and public health asset for girls and, by inference, for boys as well. Physical activity can serve as a social and cultural intersection where adolescents, parents and caring adults can come together in mutually supportive ways. The aerobics class, fitness run or basketball court are safety zones where young girls can hang out together, test and challenge themselves, learn about competition, develop physical fitness components such as cardiovascular endurance, strength and flexibility, and have fun all at the same time.

The real and potential benefits that physical activity and sport have to offer girls, their families and communities, however, continue to be stymied by several factors. Economic and cultural barriers block wider participation, especially for poor girls and girls of color. Despite increasing interest and participation rates, physical activity and sport remain underutilized resources for the many girls who are mired by sedentary lifestyles or dissuaded from getting involved because of gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices and lack of opportunity. There are also appreciable numbers of girls for whom athletic participation is associated with illness, injury and addiction to exercise rather than with physical and mental well-being. And finally, there needs to be more systematic research on the numerous ways that physical activity and sport influence girls' lives. Simply put, too little research has been done in an area where girls have too much to gain. For this reason, each of the authors has listed priorities for future research at the end of their respective sections.

This report concludes with a list of policy recommendations. The information and analyses gathered here hold implications for parents, educators, coaches, athletic administrators, public health officials and lawmakers. There is more at stake in the struggle to expand girls' physical abilities and athletic opportunities than learning to do jumping jacks or winning and losing games. Future policy decisions need to be grounded in the broader understanding that girls' involvement with physical activity and sport is just as much about physical vitality, emotional well-being, community health and educational opportunity as it is about who runs the farthest or scores the most points.

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Section I: Physiological Dimensions

Section II: Psychological Dimensions

Section III: Sociological Dimensions

Section IV: Mental Health Dimensions

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