



Exploring Meaningful Experiences in Physical Activity for Girls

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Abstract

Background: Girls' participation levels in physical education (PE) and physical activity (PA) are persistently problematic, making girls a high priority group for PA promotion (Breed et al., 2024). A recent ParticipACTION report (2022) indicates that in Canada only 31% of girls are meeting PA guidelines. Much of the research on girls' PA participation has focused on identifying barriers to engagement, including, for instance, social factors like self-consciousness and peer comparison, structural barriers such as repetitive lessons, and a lack of choice in activities (Tidmarsh et al., 2022), with similar findings in other PA contexts (Duffey et al., 2021). These barriers have led to unfavourable perceptions of PE/PA amongst girls (Ávalos-Ramos et al., 2024). Thus, there is a need to facilitate inclusive and supportive PA spaces for girls and to support PA program leaders in doing so (Duffey et al., 2021). The Meaningful PE approach has been positioned as an inclusive pedagogical framework that supports diverse learning needs and interests and can positively impact the quality of participants' engagement (Fletcher et al., 2021). While recent research has provided support for these claims in PE (Strittmater et al., 2025), little research has focused on understanding girls' experiences of meaningfulness in PE or implementing pedagogies for meaningfulness into PA contexts. This research addresses this gap by exploring the factors that influence meaningfulness of girls' experiences in recreational, community-based PA.

Methodology: This proposed qualitative research focuses on adolescent girls' experiences in an 8-week community-based PA program that intentionally prioritizes meaningfulness through pedagogies of Meaningful PE.

Results & Conclusion: Shifting the focus from barriers to meaningful engagement, this research aims to identify specific pedagogical strategies to support meaningful, inclusive PA engagement for girls and provide practical steps program leaders can take to support girls, ultimately helping to reduce inequalities in PA engagement.

Keywords: girls' participation; meaningfulness; physical education; physical activity; engagement



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