



Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities

GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH SPORT,
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTHY LIVING

FOCUS GROUP REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Canadian Association for the
Advancement of Women
and Sport and Physical Activity

Association canadienne pour
l'avancement des femmes
du sport et de l'activité physique



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WRITTEN BY: Tammy George

DESIGN: Julie Cochrane

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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS)

N202–801 King Edward Avenue

Ottawa ON K1N 6N5 Canada

Tel: 613.562.5667 Fax: 613.562.5668

Email: caaws@caaws.ca Web: www.caaws.ca

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I Introduction

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

On the Move is a national initiative designed to increase the participation of inactive girls and young women (ages 9-18) in sport and physical activity, led by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS). *On the Move* is designed to enhance sport and physical activity program delivery for girls and young women by increasing awareness of their needs, interests and experiences; and sharing promising practices, success factors, challenges and solutions to enhance existing or develop new programs. Since 1994, *On the Move* has worked at the organizational level to increase awareness about the barriers girls and young women confront to participation, and how to create positive programs and inclusive environments for this target group. The proven *On the Move Concept* advocates for fun, female-only, holistic health promotion programs where girls and young women can develop their skills, create new friendships, and build a foundation for life-long healthy active living.

The 2008 True Sport Report, “What Sport Can Do”, identifies a number of benefits of sport and physical activity for girls and young women, including protective effects against osteoporosis, anxiety, depression, suicide and adolescent pregnancy; the development of pro-education values; a greater sense of control over their own bodies; and more generalized feelings of empowerment, identity and self-direction that can help girls and young women overcome restrictive gender norms and participate more fully in society. The report further argues that increasing the number of girls participating in sport and physical activity appears to open routes through which they can acquire new community affiliations and participate more equally in community life.

Unfortunately, amongst Canadian children and youth, the participation rates

of girls continues to lag behind that of boys — only 8% of girls met the Canadian Physical Activity Guide recommendations, compared to 16% of boys (2007-2009 CANPLAY). The participation rates of girls and young women from ethnic communities are even lower, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2003) reports that Canada's immigrant communities have higher than average rates of obesity. According to Sport Canada's 2005 "Sport Participation in Canada" report, minority girls and women are the most underrepresented in the Canadian sport and recreation system. In their 2006 "Inclusive Model for Sport and Recreation Programming for Immigrant and Refugees Youth", the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) reported that many community-based sport and physical activity programs are not gender appropriate, and fail to address parental and cultural concerns with respect to girls' and young women's participation. OCASI recommended that more girl-focused programs be created.

Reports of low participation echoed what CAAWS was hearing from the field. Evaluation results and feedback from *On the Move* identified girls and young women from ethnic communities as an under-served population, and many practitioners and service providers reported a lack of education and awareness about the unique needs, interests and experiences of this target group. In 2011, with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Healthy Communities Fund, CAAWS launched the *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities: Girls and Young Women's Experiences with Sport, Physical Activity and Healthy Living* project designed to address the gaps by building capacity at the community, regional and provincial levels to increase healthy living opportunities for girls and young women from racialized communities. The project also provided CAAWS with the opportunity to revise and/or confirm *On the Move* key messages based on the voices of racialized girls and young women whom are often excluded from sport and physical activity and/or met with confusion or dismissal.

While Canada is officially a multicultural society in which all cultures are equally valued, policy and practice often fall short of this ideal. In the Ethnic Diversity Survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2002, 20% of people aged 15 and over who were part of a racialized group felt that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment sometimes or often in the five years prior to the survey because of their ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, language, accent or religion. The notion of multiculturalism is limiting, and does not examine the power dynamics involved in experiences of race and racism, explore how the processes of racialization and whiteness operate in the realms of sport, physical activity and healthy living, nor does it reflect the *lived* experiences of the members of racialized communities.

Currently, the literature around health issues is saturated with studies dealing with young adults in the areas of health promotion, disease prevention, attitudes and behaviours towards health and fitness from a psychological perspective, and surveys providing a surface view of the current health situation. Few studies have addressed the concerns and/or examined how racialized groups interpret dominant health messages. Additional research designed to examine what youth themselves believe are the important health issues confronting them, how they interpret contemporary notions of sport, physical activity and health, and how these notions inform their identities, will fill an important gap in the Canadian literature and inform contemporary debates regarding policy initiatives and educational programs. While many current programs and initiatives are based on stereotypical understandings of what is good for racialized communities, the evidence suggests that these assumptions do not necessarily reflect the reality of their lives, thereby highlighting an important gap in current programming and initiatives for racialized groups (Vertinsky, 1996).

This report attempts to give a voice and address some of the issues confronted by racialized girls and young women as they pertain to sport, physical activity and healthy living. CAAWS is interested in girls' and young women's notions of sport, physical activity and health, and how service providers can better meet their needs in an increasingly diverse society. How does culture, religion, race and/or ethnicity of girls and young women impact their healthy living opportunities? How might we further understand how service providers approach diverse communities of girls and young women? How might we bridge the gap by understanding the knowledge required to meet the needs of ethnic girls and young women? These are just some of the questions that provided the impetus for this project.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities: Girls and Young Women's Experiences with Sport, Physical Activity and Healthy Living* Report began with background information about the project. After a brief introduction to CAAWS, this section will turn to operational definitions of "race" and "racialization" as they are used in this report. The data collection methods are described in Section II. Findings from focus groups with racialized girls and young women and service providers, in addition to individual interviews with an additional six service providers, are discussed in Sections III and IV. The results confirmed the value of community-based, participant-driven programs that responds to the needs of girls and young women, rather than a one size fits all service delivery model. Moreover, the need to engage with difference in a manner that pushes the boundaries of

stereotypes and essentialized identities was also evident among the racialized girls and young women and the service providers involved. The results also communicate the nuances with respect to identity and how sport and physical activity are critical spaces for racialized girls and young women to have fun, socialize and benefit from female-only spaces that encourage new experiences in a safe and inclusive environment. The *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities* Report concludes in Section V with recommendations to enhance community service delivery for this important target group.

UNDERSTANDING RACE, RACISM AND RACIALIZATION

Race and racism are sensitive and complex topics for many people. The definitions below have been provided to clarify the use of the terms in this document, and to support further discussion on these important issues.

- **Race** is understood here as a social construct and is often related to the phenotypical and/or “biological” characteristics that pertain to a certain group of people. According to Hyman (2009, p. 5), “definitions and discussions of racism take for granted the concept of race, leaving the impression that its specific labels — ‘Caucasian,’ ‘Black,’ ‘Asian,’ etc. — reflect innate and genetically discrete categories.” However, as Hyman (2009) and others indicate, this view has since been refuted by a growing body of evidence, from across the genetic and social sciences, which demonstrates instead that race, while making reference to real biological traits, is nevertheless a socially constructed notion.
- **Racism** is the belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012). The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) “defines racism not only as an attitude, but as the specific actions that result from this attitude which impact upon, marginalize, and oppress some people” (Abella, 1984, as cited in Hyman, 2009, p. 4). Describing the effects of racism, Hyman (2009, p. 5, citing CRRF, 2008) explains that, “racism affects people not only at an interpersonal level, but also through the broader social structures of society, most notably in the systems of education, justice, media, policing, immigration, and employment, as well as through hate activity and government policies.”
- **Racialization** refers to “the social process whereby certain groups come to be designated as different and consequently subjected to differential and unequal treatment” (Galabuzi, 2004 & 2006, as cited in Hyman, 2009, p. 5). According to Galabuzi (2006), racialization is the process by which racial categories are constructed as different and unequal based on socially constructed perceptions

of external features (such as skin color, physical features, accents etc) in ways that lead to negative social, economic, health and political impacts.

As Hyman (2009, p. 5) argues, “lack of access to opportunities, marginalization and exclusion among these groups suggest that their perceived racial membership plays a significant role in shaping their collective experience — that is, they are racialized, rather than ‘merely’ racial, groups. Hyman (2009, p. 5) goes on to state that “unlike the term ‘visible minorities,’ which Canada’s Employment Equity Act defines as ‘non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour,’ ‘racialized groups’ makes clear that race is not an objective biological fact, but rather a social and cultural construct that potentially exposes individuals to racism.”

■ **Racialized Groups** can be understood as non-dominant ethnoracial communities who, through the process of racialization, experience race as a key factor in their identity and experiences of inequality (Galabuzi 2006). While Statistics Canada uses the terms “visible minorities”, “ethnic minorities”, “ethno-racial groups”, many organizations are now using the term “racialized groups” as the former terms are more static and relate primarily to number and colour while the latter term recognizes the dynamic and complex process by which racial categories are socially produced by dominant groups in ways that entrench social inequalities and marginalization.

While “visible minority”, “ethnic minority” and “ethno-racial” categories can offer strategic parameters for identifying certain population groups, understanding the central role of racialization in creating what may appear to be “natural” racial groupings helps to remind us that these groupings are not “natural” at all, but rather the product of a social process (Hyman, 2009).

ABOUT CAAWS

CAAWS is a national non-profit organization dedicated to creating an equitable sport and physical activity system in which girls and women are actively engaged as participants and leaders. CAAWS provides a number of services, programs and resources to a variety of clients, including sport and physical activity organizations, teachers, coaches, health professionals and recreation leaders. Since 1981 CAAWS has worked in close cooperation with government and non-government organizations on activities and initiatives that advocate for positive change for girls and women in sport and physical activity.

For more information about CAAWS’ other programs and initiatives, visit www.caaws.ca.

II Methods

FOCUS GROUPS

The primary goal of the *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities* project was to gain insight and learn about the social and systemic barriers to physical activity and healthy eating experienced by girls and young women from racialized communities, and the realities of providing programs to this target group. Qualitative methods were selected as they allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the participants' perspectives and social worlds (Denzin, 1994). Focus groups were the primary method, as they permitted the facilitator to gather information from a large number of participants in a short amount of time, in addition to providing a networking opportunity for those in the community around this issue. In total, 22 focus groups were conducted across the four health regions of Ontario. Eleven focus groups were conducted with racialized girls and young women, involving 150 participants, in Toronto, Brampton, Ottawa, London, St. Catharines, Windsor and Hamilton and Thunder Bay. With service providers, 10 focus group involving 71 participants were conducted as well as six individual interviews, with participants in Toronto, Brampton, Ottawa, London, St. Catharines, Windsor, Hamilton, North Bay and Thunder Bay.

The focus groups were facilitated by the Project Coordinator, who encouraged group discussion related to the purpose of the project. The Project Coordinator was a female graduate student with experience working with the specific population of interest, and was well versed in qualitative research. Throughout the focus groups, the discussions progressed naturally, and when needed the Project Coordinator encouraged and prompted participants. One of the challenges that surfaced during the focus groups was facilitating equal participation. When necessary, the Project Coordinator created opportunities for others to participate and have their voices

heard. A semi-structured interview model allowed for additional questions to surface on behalf of the participants, thereby creating a climate of transparency, candor and safety.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

To overcome barriers relating to time and geography, one-on-one phone or in-person interviews were conducted using the same conversation guide employed for the focus groups. One on one interviews allowed for the exchange of ideas and more focused conversation with respect to the goals of the project. Six interviews were conducted in this manner, involving service providers from North Bay, Thunder Bay and Toronto.

QUESTION FORMULATION

With the purpose and goals of the project in mind, a guide was created to assist with the structure and flow of the focus group discussion with both the girls and young women and service providers (see Appendices B and C). The Project Coordinator and CAAWS' National Program Director formulated and finalized the questions. The questions were developed in advance, but remained semi-structured in format thereby "maximizing discovery and description" (Reinhartz, 1992, p. 18). Remaining flexible and open to access the participants' perspectives and understanding were key to eliciting opinions and experiences. When necessary, probing was used to follow up, clarify and dig deeper into the issues discussed. Leading questions or yes or no questions were minimized to keep the flow and ensure good discussion.

RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLE

To initiate recruitment, interested communities in Ontario's four health regions were invited to reply to a Call for Interest distributed through the networks of CAAWS' and its partners. A total of 19 focus groups and six individual interviews were conducted across ten cities in Ontario: Ottawa, Toronto, Brampton, Scarborough, Hamilton, St. Catharines, London, Windsor, North Bay and Thunder Bay. These sites were selected based on interest from the host community and to meet the geographic goals of the project. Eleven focus groups were conducted with girls and young women across the cities, and eight focus groups and six individual interviews were conducted with service providers within their respective communities.

After the focus groups locations were established, site coordinators were responsible for securing a venue, and recruiting participants for two focus groups — one with racialized girls and young women, another with service providers working with racialized youth. Racialized girls and young women targeted for participation in the focus groups were between the ages of 8-18, making parental permission mandatory — site coordinators distributed permission forms. Focus groups ranged in size from 6-25, with an average of 13 participants. Focus groups with service providers were typically smaller, ranging from 5-10 due to limited availability and recruitment difficulties. The venues for the focus groups included community centers, school classrooms and conference rooms within community facilities which offered a safe space for the participants, free from distractions. Each focus group took approximately 1.5-2 hours to complete.

The *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities* focus groups sought participation from girls and young women from diverse backgrounds. One focus group entailed a fairly homogenous group of girls and young women with respect to ethnicity and socio-cultural location, but this did not hinder the project's goals in any way. Rather, the discussion was enhanced by this familiarity. The remaining focus groups were comprised of a variety of girls and young women from diverse backgrounds and communities. With respect to activity level, the girls and young women ranged from inactive, to being involved in recreational activities, to participating on their school teams and in competitive leagues.

PROCEDURE

The focus groups began with an introduction to CAAWS and the purpose and goals of the *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities* project. A round of introductions and an ice breaker were included prior to the discussion to ensure everyone in the room was acquainted. Focus groups were tape-recorded and notes were taken by the Project Coordinator to supplement the recordings. The girls and young women were asked about the barriers and challenges to participation, and whether or not they access services in the community. They also spoke to their history and journey with respect to sport, physical activity and healthy living. Focus groups with service providers focused on their experiences working with racialized communities, specifically girls and young women, and the barriers and challenges they experienced in delivering healthy living programs and services to the target group. To ensure consistency, the Project Coordinator was involved in the creation of the focus group guide and interview questions, conducting and reviewing the recorded transcripts, coding and analyzing the interviews, and writing the final report.

DATA ANALYSIS

Sixteen of the nineteen focus groups were tape recorded and partly transcribed into password protected files. The transcripts were read and re-read several times, paying close attention to the themes and categories that surfaced. Using NViVO, a qualitative software program used to assist in categorizing data, the Project Coordinator was able to organize the narratives and findings into coded themes. These themes are discussed at length in the findings section, presented next. The findings are divided into two sections — the first highlighting the analyzed results from the girls and young women, and the second featuring results from the service providers. Qualitative research insists on the importance of narratives and experience. These are captured and illustrated through a variety of vivid quotes. Names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that affect this project. First, recruiting site coordinators across the four Ontario health regions proved more difficult than expected, especially in the north. Individual interviews with interested individuals broadened the geographic diversity of the participant sample. Second, there are limitations to using focus groups as the primary method for data collection. The small sample size, if considered per focus group, restricts the generalization of the results to a larger population. While we should not advocate for generalizations across communities as the findings suggest, this might be the aim for some in the community to gain a quick cursory understanding of the issues facing racialized communities.

III Findings — Racialized Girls and Young Women

Findings from the focus groups and interviews are presented in two sections. This first section presents findings from the focus groups with racialized girls and young women. Findings from the focus groups and interviews with services providers are provided in the next section. The following narratives and analysis are designed to raise awareness about the enhancers and inhibitors to the girls' and young women's healthy living practices, and the supports and challenges confronted by organizations in providing services to racialized communities. Most importantly, these findings provide a voice for racialized girls and young women's experiences and stories, which are often omitted from discussion about community-based sport and physical activity.

Presentation of findings from the focus groups with racialized girls and young women focus initially on answering the following questions:

- *What facilitates and/or limits racialized girls and young women from participating in sport, physical activity and engaging in healthy living?*
- *What are some of the systemic barriers to participation in sport and physical activity for racialized girls and young women?*

HEALTHY LIVING IN THE LIVES OF RACIALIZED GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

The focus groups with racialized girls and young women began by asking participants what they thought about their health and activity levels. There was a clear divide between participants — some expressed that physical activity and

sport enhanced their lives and that they were healthy because they were active, ate right, and led stress-free lives. Others felt they were “not healthy” because of lack of physical activity and healthy eating options. Their comments included the following:

*For me I run and play a lot of sports because
I want to be healthy and strong.*

(THUNDER BAY)

*When I exercise, it focuses me more and gives me a
sense of accomplishment and drive to help me
achieve what I want to achieve.*

(THUNDER BAY)

*I'm not really into physical activity or sport. I don't run
and I'm not a sprinter. I spend a lot of time walking.*

(LONDON)

*I can't really say I enjoy exercising or sport, but I like
exercising more than sport. I always feel better after I have
exercised and it's a good way to relieve and get the stress out.
I keep having to say to myself that it's good for me.*

(HAMILTON)

*Exercising? Forget it . . . but I try to eat lots of fruit and vegetables.
My body feels so much better when I don't eat junk food.
So with eating yes, I'm healthy, but not so much with exercise.*

(TORONTO)

*It's hard to eat well. Every week you see something on
television — Burger King doesn't use real meat or McDonald's uses
something different or harmful. It's really hard to eat well because
your choices are minimal. That's why I don't think I'm so healthy.*

(ST. CATHARINES)

*In my culture we eat like four times a day,
and it's intimidating and I don't want to offend my family
by not eating, so I eat. But I have to say, the food is
very heavy and not the best for you.*

(OTTAWA)

At school they don't make the healthy food good. The salads are in the corner, and I'm not going to spend seven dollars on a salad when I can go across the street and get pizza for half the price.

(BRAMPTON)

When asked about *why* they engage in sport, physical activity and healthy living, participants' responses varied and were mostly grounded in being physically and mentally healthy, having fun, and having a good physical appearance. Participation in sport and physical activity was a social activity for many — being with friends was a key factor in supporting regular participation.

*I have a lot of energy, so I have to burn it.
You're working towards something and I really like that.*

(OTTAWA)

*I really like the fact that my friends are on my team,
so when I go play with them it's the running around I like,
but also hanging out and talking to them as well.*

(BRAMPTON)

Because I compete and a lot of my other friends do to, it really helps me focus and have a goal. I feel like it gives me confidence.

(BRAMPTON)

*It's really fun, I get a lot out of being active
and plus it makes me happy.*

(HAMILTON)

Sport helps me because if I feel angry, I keep it all inside, so it helps me release all those things.

(LONDON)

*I feel so happy, strong. When I don't do it,
I fee like there's a drop in my mood.*

(TORONTO)

*I feel as though I look better and feel pretty,
like glowing when I work out or go for a run.*

(TORONTO)

When I start moving, I don't want to stop.

(THUNDER BAY)

Physical activity and sport give me so much. For one, most of my friends are active, so it's like a two-in-one. I see them and I'm doing something for my body. I just love the way I feel after a practice or a workout, you can't get that anywhere else.

(THUNDER BAY)

While participants identified a number of benefits, some girls and young women were not interested in competitive environments. The embedded competition at certain levels of play was resisted and seen as no longer enjoyable, especially when combined with roughness and violence. Unfortunately, for many participants, once they reached high school opportunities to participate in sport for fun in a non-competitive environment were limited.

I like playing and being active with my friends, but I have to say competitive sport isn't fun, everyone wants to be the boss of everyone else.

(ST. CATHARINES)

I grew up playing a lot of volleyball, but at school it's so competitive. In Mexico, it wasn't as competitive as here. As you get older the more and more competitive it is and it's less for fun or leisure. When you get to high school you're either really good and go for the team, or not at all. There's no place for those that aren't advanced or play at a higher level.

(OTTAWA)

Sport seems so competitive now. The girls in gym class are really rough and competitive. Girls have left my gym class crying because it was so bad. Sometimes you just want to have fun, but a lot of my friends don't take gym anymore because of the roughness and competitiveness of it all.

(THUNDER BAY)

LOOKING GOOD

When asked about the notion of looking good as a reason to participate in physical activity and sport, many participants admitted that exercise and physical activity served a purpose in terms of “looking good” and being thin and shapely. Several participants also agreed that there was a lot of pressure on women to be healthy and fit, but identified it as “being skinny”.

*There's a lot of pressure to just be skinny.
We want men to look at us.*

(OTTAWA)

I wanna be fit. I don't wanna look like a man.

(HAMILTON)

*Girls want to be nice and skinny so guys will look at them,
but guys want to be bigger so girls will look at them. It's not the same . . .
but getting there. When you see a bigger guy, he must be funny or nice,
but when you see a bigger woman you just say, she's a "big girl".*

(ST. CATHARINES)

*In my Latin culture there's the stereotype of the curvy Latin
woman who has a nice body, but not much brains. But you feel badly
when you don't have those features and you feel badly when you're
compared. It's like come on, we don't all look like J-Lo!*

(OTTAWA)

*I would say I go to the gym a lot more now because I'm so
self conscious. There's just a lot of pressure from my family to get
married and have kids, so I feel I have to go.*

(LONDON)

*I find there's a lot of mixed messages, from family, media, school,
friends. You're either too skinny or too fat. It's just all
confusing and hard to understand.*

(TORONTO)

*The television and magazines are always telling you ways to improve
your weight, your fitness, your looks and your life. We think it doesn't have
an effect on us, this diet pill or this fitness equipment, but it does. It just
makes us feel badly about ourselves, instead of great about ourselves.*

(THUNDER BAY)

The above narratives provide a glimpse of the pressures on young women to achieve a particular body type as a potential motivator for participating in sport and/or physical activity. According to Markula (1995), the advertising industry constructs the ideal female body as “firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin” (p. 430). These messages are all part of the dominant messages on traditional femininity and on the responsibility women must take for achieving it. The comments from one

participant about negotiating Latin ideals of beauty with mainstream notions of beauty further reveal the complexities of these social pressures. Similarly, another participant made the connection between attending the gym to attain a shapely body in order to increase her marriage potential. The focus groups with racialized girls and young women also revealed the impact of both print and television media on their concept of body, physical activity and healthy living.

BARRIERS TO SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

When asking participants what limits their participation in sport and physical activity, responses included lack of time, work, school, responsibilities to home and family life, familial expectation, negative body image and low self-esteem, and limited access and opportunity. Many focus group participants indicated they participated in sport and physical activity when they were younger, but that as they've gotten older their level of participation has drastically declined.

When I was younger, I remember playing outside all the time.

(OTTAWA)

I find I just don't have the time anymore with work, school and family related things. It used to be more important than it is now.

(LONDON)

It was really important for my parents that I was physically active, because they were, but I don't think that's true anymore.

(BRAMPTON)

When it's woven into your early life, you might get tired of it, especially if you were pushed really hard.

(BRAMPTON)

When I was really young I started swimming and loved it. But I quit when I was 12-13 years old because my body started developing and my breasts were too big — so I didn't want to swim. I really didn't feel comfortable with the guys in the pool or a male instructor. I really regretted stopping and went back just recently.

(BRAMPTON)

Transportation is a big issue here. Buses hardly run and it takes a long time to get from one place to another, so it's easier to just stay close or do things at school.

(THUNDER BAY)

Financial Limitations

Many of the racialized girls and young women mentioned that the cost of sport and physical activities was an issue and limited their participation. Many expressed that participating at a local community centre or on a team was just too much for them and their families, and that sport and physical activity were not priorities compared to other family expenses.

Growing up was really tough for my parents, so me and my siblings had to work. The money we made often went to help out the family so sport and other extra curricular activities weren't an option.

(TORONTO)

Things here cost so much. The bus costs a lot, and then to swim for an afternoon it's like, \$10! I could go to a movie with friends for that amount.

(THUNDER BAY)

If swimming, gym memberships, registering for lessons or going to a dance class didn't cost so much, I would totally go more often. But as a student and working part-time, it's really hard to manage time and the cost.

(OTTAWA)

Sport and Physical Activity — A Difficult Priority

When asked to explain the transition from active to inactive lifestyles, and how they explain the decline in participation among girls and young women, a discussion around different priorities surfaced:

I mean, when you grow up you just don't make it important anymore. You have to think of your future, get a job.

(TORONTO)

People from here aren't so welcoming. Our culture is so welcoming. No one invites you out. When, someone is different or new, we try and make them feel welcome. Here people don't know anything about anyone, and they make assumptions and then it's just awkward.

(ST. CATHARINES)

*You start getting into this idea that you don't have to play.
For example, I was playing basketball, but I had to quit because I had to
get a job. And that's more important than playing basketball. Once you
start growing up, you want to do other things. Like if you get a
boyfriend, you want to hang out with him, not play sports.*

(ST. CATHARINES)

*I know physical activity should be a priority, but I don't follow it at all.
Knowing and doing are two different things.*

(LONDON)

*It's hard to put it first. You have so much on your plate — work,
school, family stuff . . . it's a lot and then you have to
think about your body.*

(OTTAWA)

*Seems to be more of a priority for boys, because there's the high
school jock and he has an identity. Boys seem to get more push
and support for the cooler sports.*

(BRAMPTON)

*I used to make it a priority, but for someone my age working
hard to get to university, working and family obligation . . . it kind
of doesn't become important anymore.*

(THUNDER BAY)

The above narratives are instructive as they suggest a shift in priorities for young women as they enter their teenage years. Sport and physical activity is seen as something to pursue at a younger age and that later on in life other priorities surface, such as finding work, earning money, homework, spending time with friends, family obligations, and finding a partner. Also revealing is the comment from one young woman who expressed that the community where she lives doesn't encourage or draw young women out to do things like people do in her culture. She articulates that her culture is more welcoming and tries to get you into the fold, suggesting a barrier to penetrating and engaging with mainstream society. When probed further with respect to why sport and physical activity becomes less of a priority for young women a discussion occurred about how young men and women are viewed, especially when involved with sport and physical activity at a later age. A sharp contrast emerged around the appropriateness of participation for young women and men, evident in the narratives below:

*Girls aren't supposed to do sport after a certain age . . .
it's more a boys' thing.*

(HAMILTON)

*What's expected of girls is cheerleading, badminton, volleyball,
but I like guys sports. I'd love to play on the soccer team, but by the time
you get to high school you're either really good or not at all.*

(LONDON)

*I think for girls it's different. For boys it's expected, they play sports,
they're cool. If you play sports people look at you different. I know this girl,
she goes to this school and she plays rugby and she's really good and
plays on the boys rugby team. And anytime anyone speaks about her, they
say it really meanly like "she's on the boys rugby team" . . . there's
nothing else people say about her that she's done wrong — they don't say
that she's a mean person, they don't say that she talks about people or that
she's rude. They just say that she's on the boys rugby team and that's
enough for people to treat her badly. Here people stereotype a lot. They
separate people a lot here. In my culture it's usually all together.*

(ST. CATHARINES)

*I think people think that there are better things for young
women to do. If I say to my parents I wanna be active or play sports,
they don't mind, but they'll tell me that I shouldn't put that first, finding
work and getting a job and school matter more. But it's weird because
my brother gets to play and run all the time. For me the
focus is different I guess.*

(BRAMPTON)

The above narratives indicate that the way in which the girls and young women perceive the value of women playing sport in comparison to their male counterparts is quite different. Participants believed that young women are not valued for their participation in sport after a certain age, and hence their priorities shift. In contrast, young men are “supposed to run around” (Hamilton) and “be really active and sporty” (Brampton). This speaks to a social barrier with respect to values and which bodies in society are acceptable to perform only in very specific ways.

FACILITATING RACIALIZED GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Focus group discussions identified a number of factors that supported racialized girls and young women's participation in sport and physical activity. This section reveals, from the point of view of girls and young women, how sport and physical activity services could be enhanced to address the barriers and challenges discussed above. Understanding the barriers and challenges to racialized women's engagement in sport, physical activity and healthy living requires grappling with a number of issues and systemic barriers to their involvement. This section attempts to address the following questions:

- *What encourages or discourages racialized girls' and young women's participation in sport and physical activity, and healthy living practices?*
- *How should programs be changed to meet the needs of racialized girls and young women?*

When asked what could assist racialized girls and young women in participating in sport, physical activity and healthy living, a number of participants articulated the desire to try new things that differed from their gym classes. A lack of exposure to a wide variety of sports, physical activities and movement was expressed.

I would love to try boxing, karate, baseball, martial arts and wrestling. I wish we had some of those at our school.

(BRAMPTON)

Gym is all about sport and who can do this better than the other person. We should do more things . . . we should be able to learn things about relationships, yoga, swimming. Everyone should learn swimming.

(LONDON)

What would I like to see more of? Hmmm . . . I think I would like to play more soccer, but without the boys because they hog the ball and show off all the time.

(WINDSOR)

I would love to skate and swim, because my family and friends aren't exposed to that. And I think it's important to learn to swim, my culture doesn't really swim.

(TORONTO)

When asked what discourages girls and young women from participating, a variety of factors were expressed. Some of the reasons included too much competition, not competitive enough, the privileging of spaces for men over women, lack of female-only programs and spaces, and being underestimated with respect to their abilities and knowledge grounded in their cultural background.

At the high school level, sport becomes too competitive and sometimes you just have to kick around with your friends and socialize and have a good time. But it's not like that in high school or you have to play on these teams that practice all the time.

(LONDON)

I have been playing very competitively for a very long time, so it's hard to just play for fun, I find. So I just play on my club teams.

(BRAMPTON)

It seems like whenever you go into the gyms or community centres, it's all guys. There's never any pick up women's sports happening. Or the girls are hanging around on the sidelines. Maybe if there were other options for the girls, it would be different.

(OTTAWA)

There's never open gym for girls . . . but I would love that.

(TORONTO)

Sometimes, when I got to the community centre, because of the way I'm dressed, with my veil, people think that I can't play sports. I love to play though. Just because I wear different clothes, doesn't mean I can't run or score!

(OTTAWA)

The above narratives are revealing in that they demonstrate the challenges young women encounter in the realm of sport and physical activity. They also suggest ways in which communities could improve their services and provide spaces to increase the participation of girls and young women. Myths about the appropriateness of sport and physical activity for girls and women, especially given traditional clothing, also persist, limiting girls' and young women's potential to thrive in this area.

Lack of Motivation?

When asked, “What would motivate you to participate more in sport and physical activity?” a variety of opinions and suggestions were put forth.

Unless I had a life threatening decision, I don't think I would be motivated.

(LONDON)

I think about how good it feels and the feeling I will get after going to the gym or playing a casual game, and that's helpful.

(TORONTO)

There's so much emphasis on how you look these days that I can't help but think I might get a boyfriend if I keep working at it.

(TORONTO)

If my friends came with me or would be willing to play something with me, that would get me out of the house and being active.

(OTTAWA)

Many of the girls and young women who participated in the focus groups would be willing to participate in sport and physical activity, however, there needs to be few things in place to facilitate the motivation. Many participants mentioned that camaraderie was an important motivator, in addition to creating female-only services and spaces. Others are motivated by the psychological benefits in addition to the social benefits and validation they get from exercise and physical activity. However, some girls and young women, due to other commitments, cannot conceive of the motivation to participate in sport and physical activity because their schedules and other priorities are so demanding.

What Needs to Change?

Focus group participants had a number of suggestions to improve sport and physical activity services, based on their school experiences, what they witness in their communities, and their personal interests and desires. Some of the suggestions are illustrated in the following narratives. The main themes that emerged are the need for wider variety of programming that encompasses various interests, making

programming less intimidating and competitive, and promoting positive leaders in the community that foster growth and encouragement of racialized girls and young women's pursuits, Furthermore, the need to creatively engage youth about the risks and benefits of sport and healthy living was also seen as an aspect to improve upon.

Don't make the activities intimidating. Usually, when I go they are full of boys and a few girls that are really good. The activities should meet all levels.

(BRAMPTON)

I find what's missing in health and gym is that people and teachers are always telling you what you should do, but don't actually help with doing it.

(TORONTO)

Healthy living and programming needs to be more realistic to match our lives, so for example the food guide and the timing of activities.

(TORONTO)

I like programs to be more fun and to be able to try new things.

(OTTAWA)

Some of the leaders or teachers don't encourage girls. Boys get a lot of encouragement because they're so good . . . but girls can be good too.

(HAMILTON)

Health class, I spent the whole year doing a unit on sexual health and I feel like health should focus on other options besides abstinence. I discovered through my research the teenage pregnancy rate is really high, so it shows that school health that's part of gym isn't really working.

(LONDON)

In school and on TV then spend a lot of time telling you what you shouldn't do, but never explain why. I think classes and programs need to start telling us why and understanding our questions.

(THUNDER BAY)

I think schools, media and programs needs to start explaining why things are bad for you or the benefits of exercise and physical activity. You hear a lot of “don’t do this”, “don’t do that”, and if you tell a teenager don’t do something, you’re going to do it! We want to understand why? What are the consequence?

People need to have the knowledge of why you shouldn’t eat something or why you should move your body.

(THUNDER BAY)

It was evident from the focus groups that racialized girls and young women wanted to be heard and had significant and valuable opinions for how to improve programs and encourage girls and young women to be active and engage in a healthier lifestyle. Their suggestions included a focus on fun, more skill and knowledge development and support, female-only opportunities, increased variety of activities, and changes in attitudes about girls and young women’s participation. It is apparent that not all the needs of the young women are being met and therefore changes to traditional program models are required. Recommended modifications are included in the report’s final section, Conclusions and Recommendations.

IV Findings — Service Providers

Focus groups and interviews with sport and physical activity service providers were included in CAAWS' *Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities* project to examine the realities of providing programs and support to racialized girls and young women and their families. Understanding the barriers experienced at the organizational level, as well as the success stories and promising practices, is essential for change. The narratives and associated analysis from conversations with service providers raise awareness about the realities, issues, barriers and challenges they confront and provide a critical look at the promises and limitations of service provision to racialized communities. The findings below are divided into the following subsections: planning, implementation, personal experience with racialized communities, and opportunities for improvement.

PLANNING

This first section discusses findings with respect to program planning, focused on service provider thoughts on the following question:

- *What are some of the obstacles and challenges to planning programs for racialized girls and young women?*

Detailed and vivid narratives from service providers identified a number of obstacles, including who is (and isn't) involved in planning, cultural or racialized differences between stakeholders, assumptions grounded in stereotypes, difficulties with commitment and retention, a lack of understanding of the needs among racialized communities, and lack of coordination and communication between organizations providing services to the community.

Who is Involved in Planning?

When asked what is taken into consideration and who is involved in the planning of programs for racialized communities, service providers spoke both about who is and who isn't involved:

We always talk to the youth and see what they want. I find that's the only way to really understand what they want and need.

(OTTAWA)

Our entire programming is based on the kids' input of what they want to do. Our goal is to have them run it as well. Our Youth Nights are really successful because the youth get to have the run of the place and plan activities that they want to do without adults telling them what they want or should do.

When they plan it, I find they take ownership of it. We just supervise.

(BRAMPTON)

We usually brain storm what we want to do and it's usually a long list, but most of it we can't afford and we have to fundraise, but I think there needs to be the buy in. You have to have them have the ownership because then they belong and come regularly.

(ST. CATHARINES)

I'm not sure we take into account the needs of racialized communities. Speaking for myself I don't think I know this. It's not really covered in our mandate. But I would say, talk to the girls when they're at this impressionable age. Talk about what's important to them.

(LONDON)

Our programs are event based, so it gets tricky to involve racialized or cultural communities. We only hold events for cultural groups like several times a year, so it gets difficult to get cultural groups involved in the planning.

(THUNDER BAY)

From the narratives above, there are a number of viewpoints on issues with respect to planning. While some service providers consider it effective to have racialized youth involved to ensure programs reflect their interests, others deliver programs and events as planned in advance, regardless of need or interest. In other cases, the needs of racialized youth are not a main focus when program registration is prioritized for funder reporting.

Showing the numbers to funding agencies becomes really important to secure funding. While we would love to have just girls programming or programming for racialized youth only, the numbers for us just aren't there and then the program is at risk for being cut, because the numbers matter.

(ST. CATHARINES)

One of the main limitations of effective programming is the lack of funding. Although not surprising as a main issue affecting programming and service delivery, it becomes revealing when linked to the needs and desires of racialized communities in terms of excursions, fieldtrips and the desire to bring in sport specialists. This point will be further elaborated upon when discussing the challenges and obstacles to implementation of programs.

Cultural Differences

One of the main themes that surfaced as a challenge to planning for racialized communities was the cultural differences between Canadian values and those of different racialized groups. The notion of values and what is expected from a community or even a nation is sometimes difficult to communicate because they reside in nuanced approaches to day-to-day living. From some of narratives below, it becomes apparent that sport, physical activity, and healthy living are deemed important to racialized families, but not at the expense of education and providing financial support and contributing to the family. Also revealing is that when sport and physical activity are priorities, it is most often for boys and men, rather than for girls and women. For many girls and women, the priorities remain educational achievement and contributions to the home.

From my experience, racialized communities don't value sport and physical activity. They value school, studying and working.

(THUNDER BAY)

Sometimes you don't realize the differences that cultures have. For example, one of our program leaders had a tattoo and piercing and the parents had a real problem with that because of what that represents to the youth.

(OTTAWA)

I remember we were having this event and we bought food and treats for the youth and their parents and we didn't realize that the food also had to be hallal and vegetarian to meet the needs of some of the racialized communities. It's a real learning experience.

(THUNDER BAY)

Sometimes, even with sport, you forget that some cultures don't encourage or value women's participation. So if we have soccer it's usually men who are playing and the women are on the sidelines. You don't realize that women don't take it up the same way. We try to have programs for women only, but we don't get the same numbers.

(OTTAWA)

Working with Muslim youth and their parents I often have to reassure them that the young girls will not be playing with boys. That's a concern in their culture.

(OTTAWA)

We try really hard to accommodate racialized youth. We have a swim class for moms and daughters and during that time we put the blinds down and limit the pool time to only women and they love that.

(HAMILTON)

People don't understand what some of these young women in the black community have gone through. These young women have to work, go to school, have a big role in their families and it's hard for them to have time for themselves. They also deal with a lot of pressures from the outside that aren't always so nice to them.

(TORONTO)

The above narratives illustrate various ideas grounded in racialized difference. In some cases, there is an assumption by service providers that the value of sport and physical activity transcends all racialized communities, when this in fact may not be the case especially for women. Moreover, in some cases, to make sport and physical activity accessible, some accommodations around modesty, food and female-only spaces are necessary to provide a safe space and build trusting relationships so girls and young women may participate.

In some cases, the beliefs and practices of racialized groups conflict with interpretations and central tenants of Canadian living and law. In moments like these, tensions rise and are met with confusion and uncertainty amongst the service providers, as evidenced below:

In some racialized communities older siblings have to take care of younger siblings and they've been told to stay in the centre or library. One area we're trying to improve on with respect to different cultures is that in Canadian law, children under certain age cannot be by themselves, we have to have a parent present...and we have to report it by law. We've have some interesting confrontations where women actually thought I hated children

*because I was taking unattended children to their parents
and they were like, “you don’t like children because you’re not
letting the kids run around”. I’ve even been called a racist.
So this is a challenge . . .*

(LONDON)

*If you are going to devote one day to multiculturalism you risk
“othering” this particular racialized community. We only recognize your
difference for one day of the year and then we go back to
business as usual.*

(TORONTO)

The narrative above (Toronto) is revealing in the sense that while the notion of Multiculturalism in Canada is intended to be inclusive with respect to racialized communities, it is in fact quite limiting in how we take up difference. The manner in which multiculturalism proper has been manifested is reflective of the quote above in the sense that difference comes to mean recognizing one’s culture for a day or month rather than difference being integrated into our everyday existence.

Awareness of Racialized Communities’ Needs

When asked about the needs of racialized communities from the vantage point of service providers, various themes emerged; from the need for effective communication, to the need to listen to the communities, to effective transportation so they can benefit from the services, to understanding how racialized youth are underestimated with respect to their abilities and knowledge often grounded in racialized stereotypes. Coming to terms with the needs of racialized communities potentially positions service providers in a better place to meet the needs of racialized girls and young women.

*You really have to speak to the youth.
Like, really listen to them.*

(HAMILTON)

*Transportation is a big need for racialized communities.
Parents don’t have time between work and such to drive kids to after
school programs. There has to be a way to get the kids here.*

(HAMILTON)

These kids are so underestimated and are still stuck as a result. Racialized bodies need a little bit more. What's frustrating for them is that back home people have moved on in their career and this affects their self esteem. So, it's also self-esteem and managing Canadian culture. It's hard when mom and dad expect you to retain your own culture and speak your Native tongue perfectly. They don't fit in here or there. Lack of self esteem plus frustration and anger and they get into trouble.

(ST. CATHARINES)

We noticed a disparity in the type of sexual education between the home and the school. At home, the young women do not talk with their parents about sex or sexuality. At school, sexual knowledge is presented as part of the girls' education, as essential information. There is not enough appropriate professional emotional support and counseling for some of these girls and young women. There are counselors available, but they aren't culturally or gender appropriate. The girls and young women I work with often come from war torn countries and the counselors are not always trained to deal with these realities.

(TORONTO)

I think you need someone to really understand the schools' impact on the kids. I don't think teachers or even people in the community have adequate training. If you look back 10 years ago there wasn't of a need or it wasn't talked about. As a youth worker, I think it's important to be knowledgeable about different cultures and that takes time. And the biggest thing too is not assuming that just because someone from one culture is not necessarily the same across the board. So this idea that all Muslim people are like this is just not true, there may be some aspects that will be relatable, but some aspects that will be completely different so lumping everyone in one culture or race is not right.

(ST. CATHARINES)

The above narratives illustrate, from various viewpoints, the needs of racialized girls and young women. While they cover a range of needs, one that particularly stands out is understanding how institutions within the contemporary Canadian context have taken up the notion of racialized difference; whether it be the system of immigration, the school system or the struggle for employment and the day-to-day lived experience of racialized bodies.

Another need that was identified as an issue by service providers was related to communication with parents and increasing their support for girls' and young women's participation, rather than communication with the girls and young women themselves. Language barriers were often identified as an issue confronting service providers, especially when communicating with parents.

Language barriers aren't an issue per se especially for the youth, but sometimes their parents have a hard time and us as well. It would be nice if we could somehow have our information translated in different languages in order to access different communities.

(HAMILTON)

It would be a nice gesture to have the programs we offer in different languages because then we would have a better time convincing and earning the trust of the parents which is key to planning and youth participating.

(WINDSOR)

The narratives above suggest that there is a value of investing in translation services to effectively communicate with racialized communities.

Lack of Coordination and Communication Among Service Providers

Some focus group participants talked about a lack of coordination and communication amongst community organizations involved in service provision. This proved to be an obstacle, resulting in duplication of services and ineffective program promotion. In some cases, the lack of communication was due to competition among organizations with respect to recruitment of racialized girls and young women and their families.

There seems to be no coordination and sharing of information between the organizations. So we never know what's going on and what they're doing or offering. We could probably plan different things if we knew what was going on. You don't want to repeat things and you want your programs to be unique.

(ST. CATHARINES)

I find there's a little competition between organizations sometimes. No one shares information and I find everyone would benefit if there was a resource that compiled all the information of things that were going on it would be easier to plan and prepare.

(TORONTO)

Information is crucial. If people know what we're offering it would get our word out and possibly have more youth engaged.

(OTTAWA)

Not all service providers expressed this concern with respect to a lack of communication and collaboration within their communities. One group expressed that “it is because of our collaboration that we are able to make our funding dollars go further” (*Thunder Bay*), and another expressed that through collaboration they are “able to plan more events and attract more people” (*Hamilton*). There is value in working together to enhance programs and services for racialized girls and young women. Collaboration with other organizations or even with branches within an organization are beneficial for making funding dollars go further with respect to planning.

IMPLEMENTATION

This section attempts to answer the following question with respect to the implementation phase of program delivery for racialized girls and young women:

- *What are some of the barriers to the implementation of services for racialized communities?*

This question attempts to identify some of the barriers and obstacles that surfaced among service providers regarding implementation. Through their narratives, a number of barriers were discussed, including lack of funding, challenges to retention of racialized youth, and for some organizations, the low priority placed on recruiting and retaining racialized girls and young women.

Lack of Funding

One of the biggest themes that emerged throughout discussions with services providers was a lack of funding to carry out programs or events, and sometimes to even meet the goals of the organization.

Funding is big problem for us. So even if we have good programming we often can't afford to do things the girls want to do such as hire a yoga instructor and have a yoga class, or play volleyball with a skilled instructor.

(OTTAWA)

Our entire program now is based on what the girls want to do, within reason of course. Sometimes, we just don't have the funding for fieldtrips and other excursions, but we try to implement what they want most of the time.

(ST. CATHARINES)

Promotion is a big concern for us and we just don't have those promotional dollars. So how do we get our word out? Advertising is so expensive, so we don't even bother for a small space in a newspaper.

(TORONTO)

We never have enough dollars to run the events we want to do, so sometimes we have to coordinate with others who have money to make the event go the way we want it to go. If you want to serve refreshments it's hard because we can't really afford much, so sometimes we let some time go by before having an event so that we have more money to host a better event.

(THUNDER BAY)

Sometimes, we have to fundraise to do the activities the girls want to do. It's hard to get instructors and go to facilities without some money, so we have to get the youth to buy in and then we can fundraise to make up the difference.

(BRAMPTON)

It is clear that funding is a difficult and complex issue for many organizations who provide programs to racialized girls and young women. Due to limited budgets, funding must be shared among many different groups and priorities. Given the value of promoting healthy living for racialized girls and young women, and their families, budget allocation policies and practices should be examined to ensure equity.

While indirectly connected to funding as an issue that should be considered is making racialized girls and young women an essential part of their mandate. For many service providers promoting healthy living to racialized girls and young women was not a priority. For some, engaging racialized communities was not part of their organization's mandate. For others, promoting sport, physical activity and healthy eating was beyond the scope of their organization.

It's only recently that racialized groups became a focus of our mandate. There was such a need in the community that we started to tailor events and activities for them, but we have so many things on the go that sometimes it's hard to make them a priority.

(OTTAWA)

Our organization doesn't focus on sport and physical activity per se, but we do deal with racialized groups and are only now understanding the challenges we face with that target group.

(LONDON)

Participant Recruitment and Retention: Who Comes, Who Doesn't?

Another significant barrier to implementing programs for racialized girls and young women was consistency in program registration and participation. Several service providers expressed concerns regarding low participation numbers and challenges retaining racialized girls and young women. Some service providers recognized that racialized youth have other priorities (i.e., work, school, family care) that often compete with programs offering sport and physical activity.

Getting the youth there isn't the problem. It's keeping them there.

The older they get the harder it is to keep them there because of all their other things like school and work and their social lives.

(TORONTO)

If we're able to gain the trust of the parents and the community then we have more success keeping and engaging the youth. We have to get the parents to buy in and then our programs will be sustainable.

(ST. CATHARINES)

We really do a lot of outreach and we also have our name that people are familiar with. That really helps us. Once the girls are there, they keep coming.

(HAMILTON)

The service providers identified social connections as a key determinant of sustained participation, discussing the value of having friends involved in the program.

Most of them come because their friends recommended the program and also to be with each other.

(OTTAWA)

Initially, they got engaged because they had to complete their volunteer hours. Now they come because they're all friends.

(OTTAWA)

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES

This section illustrates service providers' personal experience with racialized girls and young women. The main question this section addresses is:

- *What are service providers learning from racialized girls and young women?*

The narratives in this section reveal several themes and the need to understand various pieces of cultural knowledge that may differ from Canadian values and way of life. More importantly, the manner in which these differences surface during planning and implementation phases also reveals how racialized girls and young women are often framed and characterized. Racialized girls and young women who were born in Canada or have lived in the country for a long time are often considered to have the same experiences as recent immigrants/newcomers to Canada.

Learning from Racialized Communities

When asked about key learning experiences working with racialized girls and young women, service providers shared a number of insights.

*I've learned that that just because they're not newcomers
doesn't mean they're not struggling.*

(OTTAWA)

*The needs of racialized girls are always changing. Whether it's figuring
out their own culture in relation to Canadian culture, or school system and their
friends or finding a job, it's different for them at different times.*

(BRAMPTON)

*You have to gain their trust and it's a matter of learning. We didn't
know before, to understand what kind of offering you can make to families
that have specific requests that we don't get from other families.*

(WINDSOR)

*We have to work hard at understanding cultural knowledges
and really understand the differences.*

(HAMILTON)

*I think young women in our communities are always fighting
with their own culture and Canadian/white culture. It's difficult for them
because at home they aren't Spanish enough, but then to the outside,
they don't fit in either . . . it's hard for them.*

(ST. CATHARINES)

Because of stereotypes it's easy to really underestimate these girls and their abilities, but once they're comfortable with you and the group, they are so animated and full of life. You think they're not active or don't care about moving or sport skills, but they really love being challenged.

(HAMILTON)

The preceding narratives reveal that providing services for racialized girls and young women is simply not a one-dimensional task. Understanding how racialized girls and young women negotiate Canadian society and their own racialized community is vital to understanding their needs and tailoring programs to address their issues. This negotiation is often complex as it involves adopting certain values and knowledge from dominant Canadian culture and marrying this with the values and knowledge of one's own racialized community. This idea of "cultural knowledges" is grounded in the idea that racialized communities bring a unique set of understandings about the world, health, sport, movement and the body.

Understanding the Lived Experience of Racialized Communities

Key to service providers' understandings of racialized girls and young women was comprehending their day-to-day existence and daily negotiations. The narratives below reveal complex negotiations and issues of belonging:

*I wondered how come Christina is not eating her lunch?
Her mom would pack black beans and other stuff from Mexico, and when you least expect it they reject it. Christina wasn't eating not because she didn't like it, but rather because she wanted to belong. They don't want to be different. It's a shame that they get ostracized for eating what's so much better for them and instead they feel shame because it smells or looks different. It's better than eating white bread sandwiches! It's sad.*

(ST. CATHARINES)

This past week at the local catholic high school they had a multicultural festival. So, a lot of the girls that I work with went, and they had some dances and things and some of the girls were like "you have to wear your African dress it's our heritage, culture and where we come from", and a couple of them were like "we're in Canada now, we don't wear that now."

(LONDON)

The above narratives are telling for a couple of reasons. First, the negotiation around food and cultural dress suggests there is a strong need or desire to assimilate into the Canadian mainstream. This is evidenced by the not wanting to emphasize one's difference by eating different foods or wearing alternative cultural dress. Secondly, as a result of this denial of one's cultural knowledges and customs, it would appear as though racialized girls and young women learn that difference is negative and acceptance is tenuous and fleeting. There is a denial of the self when immersed in Canadian society, and belonging becomes difficult with respect to bringing forth markers of difference such as food and dress.

The narratives below also capture the lived experience of racialized youth and how they negotiate the school system. Racialized girls and young women, even after living in Canada for many years, are often seen as newcomers or immigrants lacking the knowledge of the Canadian way of life and thus not belonging.

I've learned that there's a lot of frustration around the school system. Some kids, after all this time, are still stuck in ESL. I understand the system and I understand the need for English skills, but I also understand the youth perspective because the student will be 19 or 20 and in high school. And the parents will be frustrated and ask, "Why is this taking so long?" It's a challenge because the student can't find a job and there's frustration. So parents are experiencing the same cycle.

(ST. CATHARINES)

Among the young black women we serve there is a lot of frustration because they constantly feel underestimated and looked down upon. Even if they have been here for a long time, mastered the English language, and do well in school. The cultural forces that label them are really bad and do a number on how they feel about themselves.

(TORONTO)

The above narratives indicate that service providers are well aware of the persisting social stigma racialized girls and young women face. Just because girls and young women have mastered Canadian ways with respect to language, schooling and work force participation, they are still positioned ways that are oppressive, impacting their self-concept and how they engage in community life.

WHAT NEEDS TO IMPROVE?

This final section highlights discussion with service providers about how program and service delivery for racialized girls and young women can be improved, in response to the following question:

- *How can programs be changed to meet the needs of racialized girls and young women?*

Throughout this section, the narratives reveal several common themes. Fundamental to enhancing services for racialized girls and young women are understanding the needs and building relationships with the family as whole; broadening understandings of sport, physical activity and healthy living; increasing direct engagement with racialized communities; and educating service providers and decision-makers about race, racism and discrimination.

Building Relationships with the Family

One of the major concerns among service providers was the need to better understand the needs of racialized families. This was especially true for those working with younger age groups. Parents often seemed reluctant to allow their daughters to participate in sport and physical activity for various reasons including playing with boys (Ottawa), lack of trust and safety (Windsor), and/or religious concerns (Hamilton).

I think if we can get the parents on our side, we'll get the kids. Sometimes parents aren't sure what their children are getting into and feel really uncomfortable with the idea. We need to convince them that getting involved in play, whether it's sport or physical activity, is an important part of a child's development.

(OTTAWA)

I'm really close with the families, so they really trust me with their kids. I've been with these families for years, so they trust me with the activities I want to do, whether it's soccer or trying to cook a healthy meal.

(HAMILTON)

Appealing to the parents I find is a big one. Because they're the ones dropping their kids off, and paying for the programs. If we can somehow get the word out that the programs we offer are fun and good, we'd have more success.

(BRAMPTON)

Building relationships with the parents and guardians of racialized girls and women is key to addressing concerns that may limit their support for their daughters' participation in sport and physical activity.

Expand Sport, Physical Activity and Healthy Living Options

Focus group discussions with service providers revealed the need to expand sport and physical activity programs to include “non-traditional” (by Canadian standards) activities. The sport and physical activity experiences of many racialized girls and young women are limited to school-based physical education, which is often limited in the number and type of activities provided. For a variety of reasons mentioned above (i.e. time, school work, jobs, family, etc.) many racialized girls and young women do not participate in sport and physical activity outside of school, especially into adolescence. In order to increase the participation of racialized girls and young women, service providers suggested expanding the types of activities provided to include activities such as yoga, dance, wrestling, martial arts and self defense.

There's an assumption that racialized girls are going to love what they see on T.V. This is not the case — I find a lot of racialized girls want to try things like boxing, wrestling and martial arts. If we had those available that would be great and I think appeal to a lot more people.

(BRAMPTON)

What about things like cricket or swimming or something different than basketball or soccer? A lot of my girls would love swimming because they don't really know how to swim and it's a great skill to learn and have.

(TORONTO)

A lot of my girls keep talking about rock climbing or martial arts or dancing. In school they're exposed to a lot sports like soccer and basketball, and either you have to be really good or you just don't play on the team. Lots of them don't even take gym because of that.

(THUNDER BAY)

Being inclusive, anyone can come, we don't really single out anybody. Listening to you all today has been really interesting because our organization is trying for multicultural focus, so our programs are just open ended. Having a variety of programming and an open door seems to serve us well.

(ST. CATHARINES)

Based on the narratives above, there is value in consulting with racialized girls and young women about their interests to support the creation of programs that meet their needs and interests. Comments from the focus group participants require service providers to go beyond traditional programming to provide racialized girls and young women with new and diverse sport and physical activity experiences.

Effective Communication and Promotion to Racialized Communities

One of the biggest areas for improvement identified by service providers was related to the promotion of programs. This was often expressed as a struggle due to limited promotional budgets, and challenges accessing target groups to communicate the details of available community services.

Like I said, we have no promotional or advertising dollars, so that makes it really difficult for us to get the word out. We have these great programs, but have to get people to use them. It's a big problem for us.

(ST. CATHARINES)

Somehow we need to access more racialized communities, but I'm not sure how we do that . . . if friends could tell friends that would be great, that would be the best way . . . to have friends sell the programs to friends.

(OTTAWA)

We rely a lot on members of the community who have used our services to get the word out. I wish there were other ways like a listserv or flyers.

(WINDSOR)

Maybe speaking in schools would help. Getting access might be difficult though, but that might work to get more youngsters into our program.

(BRAMPTON)

Resist Generalizing Members of Racialized Communities

Finally, one of the most important areas of concern, and hence improvement, was to resist essentializing racialized communities. Often, sport, physical activity and healthy living practices are grounded in mainstream and normalized understandings of play, movement, skill level and health. Many service providers were critical of approaching racialized groups with this mainstream lens, and believed that an alternative approach was necessary to meet the unique needs of racialized girls and young women, but most importantly to deal with the contemporary issue of difference.

As a youth worker, I think it's important to be knowledgeable about different cultures and take the time. So, this idea that all Muslims are alike — there are some aspects that might be relatable, but some aspects will be completely different. So grouping everyone in one culture or race together is not right and causes a lack of understanding.

(BRAMPTON)

We have to put labels on everything! We have to be black or white and as soon as a youth has multiple identities, somewhere in the middle, everyone has trouble. Teachers, parents, government agencies, have issues with the identity of these youth . . . I think it's important to understand that just because youth are of a certain background, you don't necessarily shove it down their throat. We should at the same time, give them a chance of exploring multiple identities in Canada.

(ST. CATHARINES)

Even when we have pick up basketball, let's say, it's usually all black youth participating in the gym, so then basketball gets stereotyped as only for the black kids. And you see this at a lot of community centres because they practice here and then they want to make their school teams too.

(OTTAWA)

While some of the narratives above do not directly speak to active living explicitly, we should, nevertheless, understand the impact of stereotypes on the healthy living behaviours of racialized girls and young women. As Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb (2012) argues, racialization and sport are intimately connected and we can't forget that racial stereotypes and assumptions also creep into our dominant understanding of sport and healthy living. The challenge that many of the service providers expressed is to resist succumbing to the stereotypes of the racialized communities they serve, particularly with respect to racialized girls and young women who are often perceived as passive, docile and inactive (George & Rail, 2005).

Building on the findings presented in the last two sections, this report now turns to recommendations to enhance healthy living program delivery and utilization by racialized girls and young women.

V Recommendations to Engage Racialized Girls and Young Women

The recommendations below are based on the findings shared in this report. The key to bridging the gaps and addressing racial difference is both ideological and practical, requiring an examination of all institutions, including schools, community organizations involved with sport and physical activity and health promotion, and associated municipal, provincial/territorial and national governing agencies. However, complementing organizational policy and practice, addressing the gaps also requires individuals to examine their own practice and its impact on the involvement of racialized girls and young women.

KEY COMPONENT I — EDUCATE ABOUT CULTURAL AND RACIALIZED DIFFERENCE

All staff and volunteers working directly or indirectly with racialized girls and young women and their families must be educated in dealing with difference and a variety of racialized communities. This will ensure programs, services and environments are inclusive of the diverse needs of racialized girls and young women, and help avoid assumptions and stereotypes. The girls and young women who participated in the focus group revealed that their physical appearance was often a key marker of identity. As a result, assumptions about the beliefs of their cultural or ethnic community, such as ideas about women, their abilities, their world view and perceived reluctance to assimilate into Canadian culture and society, negatively impacted their day to day lives, including their participation in sport and physical activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Educate Yourself** — Become a champion for addressing these issues in your organization or community. You don't need to be an expert, but you do have to be willing to ask difficult questions and take action to support change.
- **Provide Training** — Provide mandatory anti-racist and cultural sensitivity training for all staff and volunteers. Provide ongoing professional development by connecting staff and volunteers to available resources, organizing guest speakers, etc. These opportunities will increase awareness of key issues, and provide a forum to ask questions and discuss challenging and sensitive scenarios.
- **Get Specific** — Take time to learn about the diverse religious, cultural and ethnic groups in your community — e.g. customs, clothing and dietary practices, attitudes, political and geographical history, etc. Be careful not to make assumptions or rely on stereotypes — racialized communities are diverse and complex. Consult with parents, community leaders, and program participants to understand cultural and religious beliefs that must be addressed to enable girls and young women to participate (e.g. a female only environment, avoidance of certain activities, expectations of young women etc.)
- **Continue the Effort** — The barriers limiting the participation and leadership of racialized communities are not going to be addressed overnight. Provide forums where racialized communities can draw attention to persisting barriers (including racism) and assist in creating a solution. Establish relationships with community leaders to support regular and honest communication. For example regular community meetings or socials with members of the community and organization staff, informal conversations, simple surveys, etc.

KEY COMPONENT II — CREATE TARGETED PROGRAMS

According to *Culture Counts: A Guide to Best Practices for Developing Health Promotion Initiatives in Mental Health and Substance Use with Ethnocultural Communities* using a “one size fits all” approach to health promotion is not only ineffective, it does not support the idea of equity. For CAAWS, gender equity requires that girls and young women be provided with a full range of activity and program choices that consider their needs, interests and experiences (CAAWS, 2011). Focus group findings support a nuanced approach to program delivery that addresses the unique barriers racialized girls and young women confront, as well as their diverse interests. Essential to focus group participants were fun, inexpensive, easy to get to programs where they could spend time with their friends.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Ask the Girls** — Consult with target racialized girls and young women on program design and delivery, including program scheduling (day of the week, time of day), length, location, activities, level of competition, leaders, etc. Consider religious holidays, exam periods, other community programs, and even popular TV shows when scheduling the program. Proactively address their barriers to participation in the program’s design, including cost, transportation and available equipment. Regularly check in with participants to evaluate the program and change features that are not working.
- **Variety is the Spice of Life** — Focus group participants were often unaware of the variety of activities available in their community, or restricted their participation to stereotypically “female” pursuits. With cultural and religious concerns in mind, create opportunities for girls and young women to try something new. Integrate traditional and non-traditional activities, invite members of the community to be guest instructors and share their sports and interests, and promote community-based opportunities by visiting pools, arenas, courts, climbing gyms, and parks.
- **Move More** — To positively influencing the health of racialized girls and young women, quality programs must provide opportunities for them to be active in sport and physical activity, and have healthy food choices. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity per day for children and youth (CSEP, 2011).
- **Get On the Move** — CAAWS’ national *On the Move* initiative provides a list of Top 10 Success Factors for developing programs for girls and young women. Key characteristics include programs that are focused on fun, female only, and provide skill development opportunities in a safe and supportive environment. For more information visit www.caaws.ca/onthemove.

KEY COMPONENT III — DIVERSIFY LEADERSHIP

According to George Dei, a prominent anti-racist scholar, “bodies matter”, referring to the effects of visible representation in racialized communities (cited in Aguiar et al., 2000). Both racialized girls and young women and service providers expressed the importance of involving community members in the development and delivery of successful programs. This is especially true for sport and physical activity programs, where leaders from within the racialized community will increase the credibility of the program and host organization, and the comfort level of parents and participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Recruit** — Proactively recruit diverse staff and volunteers to increase the representation of racialized groups throughout your organization, and enhance organizational performance and decision-making. Draw on members of target communities to be ambassadors for a program and/or your organization's services — athletes, coaches, religious or cultural leaders, members of the business community, etc. Create partnerships with other organizations that serve the racialize groups in your community, e.g. religious, cultural, sport and physical activity and/or service organizations.
- **Hire Diverse Female Leaders** — Programs targeting racialized girls and women should be led by racialized female leaders. This will address cultural beliefs and practices that require female-only environments, and provide positive female role models for participants, their families, and other staff and volunteers. Invite other women to be involved as guest speakers and instructors, introducing program participants to a variety of new sports and providing valuable educational sessions.
- **Support Success** — Build capacity and support future success by providing training for young staff and establishing youth leadership initiatives — social and systemic barriers may have limited racialized youth's opportunities for leadership and professional skill development.

KEY COMPONENT IV — ADDRESS THE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Addressing systemic barriers refers to focusing on policies and/or practices that unfairly exclude members of designated groups from taking part in a particular organization. According to Agócs (2004) systemic barriers consist of patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate a position of disadvantage for racialized persons. Systemic barriers include lack of accommodation and flexibility around clothing and the need for female only spaces, limited activity options, reduced access due to program location, costs and registration methods, and hiring practices that fail to recruit staff and volunteers from racialized communities. Paying careful attention to potential systemic barriers requires careful examination of the organizational culture that is designing and implementing programs for racialized girls and young women, so that their participation can be maximized.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Implement Policy** — Develop and implement policies that support the provision of quality healthy living programs and services for racialized communities. Review gender equity, human resource, program subsidy, and harassment and anti-discrimination policies, as well as policy and practice relating to facility and funding allocation.
- **Make it a Priority** — Canada is becoming an increasingly diverse society. Sport and physical activity service providers with a mandate to serve their community must address the needs of racialized communities and actively engage them in their programs to be successful. Review and consider updating your organization’s mandate and/or policies to reflect the growing diversity of your community. This will clearly signal your commitment to the community, and provide support for staff and volunteers to change practice. Evaluate programs and services to identify gaps and barriers, and opportunities for enhancement.
- **Build Partnerships** — Build partnerships and collaborate with diverse organizations serving racialized communities. These opportunities will increase your understanding about the needs of the community, enhance program promotion and communication, reduce duplication of services, and enhance your credibility.
- **Colourblindness Does Not Equal Equity** — Many organizations believe that the most important contribution they can make in creating a more inclusive culture is to be “colour-blind”. The implication being that an individual’s race, religion and/or cultural background are irrelevant and that people should be treated equally. While a colour-blind approach appears to be compassionate and fair, it fails to address individuals’ and communities’ different needs, assets and perspectives. Instead, individuals and organizations committed to increasing equity and the engagement of racialized girls and young women, and other members of racialized communities, should recognize and celebrate difference, building programs and services based on the needs, interests and experiences of the target groups.

APPENDIX A

Focus Group Details

Focus Group Location	# of Participants (Girls/Youth)	# of Participants (Service Providers)	Comments
Ottawa	22	—	• Young women aged 12-18
Ottawa	12	—	• Girls aged 8-12
Ottawa	—	10	• Service providers from the area
St. Catherines	10	9	• Young women aged 12-18 • Service providers from the area
Brampton	8	2	• Youth women aged 14-16 • Interview with 2 service providers
Brampton	15	8	• Youth women aged 14-18 • Service providers in Brampton including the YMCA and surrounding community centers from the area
Toronto	12	2	• Youth women aged 12-18 • Service providers from the area
Toronto	15	7	• Youth women aged 12-18 • Service providers from the area
Hamilton	11	7	• Girls and young women aged 9-14 • Service providers from the area
London	10	7	• Young women aged 14-18 • Service providers from the area
Windsor	10	8	• Young women aged 12-18 • Service providers from the area
Thunder Bay	25	8	• Girls and young women aged 9-18 • Service providers from the area
North Bay	—	3	• Service providers from the area via conference calls
TOTAL TO DATE:	150	71	

Focus Group Questions for Racialized Girls and Young Women

Notions of Sport and Physical Activity

- What does “being fit” or “in shape” or healthy mean to you?
- What are key words that you would use to define sport and physical activity?
- Can you describe to me what a healthy individual would look like?
- What qualities would she have? Are there any differences for men?
- How/Why is being fit different/similar for men and women?
- What do you think of women or girls who engage sport and physical activity?
- Do you think it should be a priority for girls and women? Boys and men?
- Do you care about being healthy? How much? Why?
- What does it mean if someone is not healthy? Do you often meet people who are not unhealthy? How do you think they got to be unhealthy?

Sources of the Notions of Sport and Physical Activity

- Where do you think your ideas on sport and physical activity come from? Why?
- Where do you get information on sport and physical activity? Is there a lot of information out there? Are you interested in this information? Why/Why not?
- How do you learn how to be active? How do you learn about not being active and the consequences of that?
- Is the media useful? Why/Why not? Which ones? How?

Culture and Fitness and Physical Activity

- Do your parents believe in sport and physical activity in the same way you do? Why do you think this is so?
- How are they the same (or different)? Why do you think this is so?
- Growing up, were there other things/events or experiences that may have changed or confirmed your ideas of sport and physical activity?

- Are you involved in your community? How so?
- What are the ideas in your community about sport and physical activity? How are they the same (or different) from yours? Why?
- Do you think that your culture/religion influence your sport and physical activities? How?
- Do you watch any cultural movies?
- Do you eat food from your own culture?
- How would you identify yourself?
- Are you familiar with the terms “white-washed” or “coconut”?

Integration of the Notions of Sport and Physical Activity in Day-to-Day Life

- Are you concerned about your health? Why/Why not?
- Is your healthy living a priority in your life? Why/Why not?
- Does participation in sport and physical activity matter to you? Why/Why not?
- Do you enjoy sport and physical activity? Why or why not? Which ones?
- Do you think that you are healthy? What makes you say that?
- Why (or why not) do you engage in physical activity and or sport? (How does it help you? Why do you exercise? What motivates you?)
- What do you do to stay healthy? (Do you participate alone? How many times a week? Where: outside/local gym/school/sport team/? Is it expensive? Are you aware of other? facilities, programs?)
- What are the things that prevent you from being healthier? From participating in sport and physical activity more?
- What do you think you could do to improve your health?
- Do you think that engaging in sport and physical activity has an impact on health? In what ways?
- How do you feel about your body? Are you satisfied with how you look?

Focus Group Questions for Service Providers

Current Service Delivery

- Can you explain to me your role in the organization?
- What kinds of services do you provide?
- Does your organization provide any programs and services specifically for girls and young women? (Currently or in the past)
- Does your organization provide any programs and services specifically for specific ethnic or racialized groups?
- What factors are considered when planning a program and or service?
- Do you take into consideration the needs of a particular community when planning? Can you give me an example? How are these needs identified?

Engagement Strategies

- Are racialized girls and young women engaged in sport and physical activity programs provided by your organization?
- What would you say are the main reasons that girls and young women engage in your programs/services?
- What have you learned about providing programs for racialized girls and young women? What are the important program characteristics?
- What strategies have been used to engage or outreach to racialized girls and young women? What's worked, what hasn't?
- Aside from sport and physical activity do you find that racialized girls and young women are interested in other healthy living practices such as healthy eating? What about smoking? Do your programs touch on these issues?
- Do you take notice of the eating habits or other health issues that may impact racialized girls and young women?
- What strategies have been used to include racialized girls and young women in program planning and decision making? What's worked, what hasn't?

- What strategies have been used to include racialized girls and young women program delivery? What's worked, what hasn't?
- How do you personally motivate or try to engage girls and young women in your programs/services with respect to sport and physical activity?

Barriers

- In your experience, what do you think prevents or limits racialized girls' and young women's participation in sport and physical activity? What are some of the specific needs / key barriers racialized girls and young women confront?
- Are there specific ethnic or racialized groups that are harder to engage than others? What unique barriers do they confront?
- What strategies have you/your organization used to address these barriers? What's worked, what hasn't?
- What challenges have you/your organization confronted in the delivery of targeted programs, or in accommodating the diverse needs of racialized girls and young women?
- What would you say is your biggest challenge with respect to engagement of the services and programs you provide to specific communities?
- Do you have adequate funding to carry out your vision for the programs and services in your community? If not, what are the priorities / what often gets left out?
- What gaps currently existing in the program and service delivery in your community?
- In what ways can the programs and services provided be improved?

Imaginative

- From your experience what would be the ideal program/service to provide for racialized girls and young women? Describe the key program characteristics, activities, etc.
- What prevents you from achieving it?
- What do you believe needs to happen to improve the delivery of programs and services for racialized girls and young women, and increase their participation in healthy active living?

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