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Moving Beyond the Gym: Exploring Life Skill Transfer Within a Female Physical Activity-Based Life Skills Program

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Abstract

Physical activity programs are viable contexts to foster life skills. Researchers contend that programs must be structured to deliberately teach life skills and how such skills can be transferred. The purpose of this study was to understand female youths’ perceptions of life skills transfer from participation in a physical activity-based life skills program. Interviews were conducted with eight youth. Results indicated that youth learned intrapersonal (i.e., emotional regulation, focus, goal setting) interpersonal (i.e., respect, responsibility, social skills), and physical activity skills and applied these skills in other life domains. Leaders’ practical strategies used to explicitly teach transferable skills are discussed.

*Keywords:* Positive Youth Development, physical activity, qualitative methods, life skills, transfer
The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework was developed in response to the deficit-reduction approach that viewed youth as problems to be managed within society and in turn, focused on minimizing problem behaviors (Damon, 2004). This framework emerged from the field of positive psychology, which focuses on building necessary strengths and qualities that help individuals and communities flourish (Lerner, 2012; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Such qualities can be wide-ranging and include psychological attributes, life skills, and health habits.

Researchers have recognized that life skills are a critical component for enhancing psychosocial development within sport and physical activity programs (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Gould & Carson, 2008; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005).

Life skills have been defined in many ways (Gould & Carson, 2008). For the purpose of this study life skills were defined as “skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighborhoods” (Danish et al., 2004, p. 40). According to these authors, life skills can be generally classified as intrapersonal (e.g., focus, perseverance, goal setting, emotional regulation) or interpersonal (e.g., sportspersonship, honesty, teamwork, respect). Intrapersonal skills refer to skills that are more internal in nature whereas interpersonal skills refer to skills that are more useful during social interactions. It is critical to note that one major component of life skills includes the necessity of skill transfer and application to other contexts outside of where it was learned, such as school, home, work, and/or community (Danish et al., 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005), helping youth develop the capacity to successfully cope
with various life situations (Gould & Carson, 2008; Papacharasis et al., 2005; Petitpas et al., 2005).

Some researchers have argued that the transference of life skills is not immediate, encouraging coaches and programmers to take this into consideration when developing and implementing life skills programs (Allen, Rhind, & Koshy, 2015; Petitpas et al., 2005). For example, within Petitpas et al.’s (2005) framework for planning youth sport programs that foster psychosocial development, the authors assert that for successful transference to occur, coaches and program leaders need to help youth identify transferable skills and provide opportunities for them to practice these skills. Also, within Gould and Carson’s (2008) model of coaching life skills in sport, the fifth and final component of the model highlights factors influencing the transferability of life skills to non-sport settings (e.g., perceived value of the skill, confidence in ability to transfer, comprehension of transfer, support or reinforcement transfer).

Recently Turnnidge, Côté, and Hancock (2014) wrote a position paper which discussed two ways life skill transfer can be facilitated within a sport context; using an implicit or explicit approach. An implicit approach to transfer directs attention towards developing sport-specific outcomes, but does not deliberately frame these outcomes as transferable skills (e.g., a coach that discusses the application of leadership within a sport context, but does not reference how this skill can be utilized in contexts beyond sport). An explicit approach involves fostering an environment in which the transferability of skills is explicitly taught by coaches (e.g., leadership is not only taught within the sport context, but the coach also makes reference to how this skill can be applied in other contexts outside of sport). Although both approaches have been shown to facilitate life skill transfer within the literature (e.g., Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Camiré, Trudel, and
Forneris, 2012; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008; Walsh et al., 2010), no studies to our knowledge have examined which approach is more likely to lead to transferable skills. Camiré and colleagues (2012) used both athlete and coach perspectives to explore philosophies and strategies used by model coaches to teach and transfer life skills. Findings indicated that many coaches used deliberate strategies to educate their athletes on how to develop and transfer life skills to other domains, such as the use of keywords and peer evaluations, as well as providing opportunities for youth to display the skills, modelling, and taking advantage of teachable moments. However, coaches within this study had conflicting perspectives on athletes’ comprehension of and ability to transfer skills learned in the sport context to other life domains. Similarly, in another study that explored explicit life skill transfer in a school-based sport program, results highlighted the importance of utilizing teachable moments to promote transference and draw connections to the school environment (Walsh, Ozaeta, & Wright, 2010). However, neither study fully explored the youth experience of transferring life skills as the focus was predominantly on strategies coaches used for facilitating transfer.

Other research that has explored the concept of life skill transfer (Allen et al., 2015; Hayden et al., 2015; Lee & Martinek, 2012) from the perspective of youth participants has primarily been conducted within the school context. Only one study, to our knowledge, has explored life skill transfer to multiple contexts in a program that was implemented outside of the school context (see Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013). Most studies have focused on transfer from a school-based sport context (e.g., high school sport, physical education programs, afterschool programs) to a school context (e.g., Allen et al., 2015; Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001; Walsh et al., 2010). Furthermore, previous research has tended to use solely male participants and analyzed data from only 1 year of program participation. Therefore this study
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aim to contribute to several gaps within the literature as it focused on a community-based life skills program for female youth that was independent of the school environment and explored explicit life skill transfer over the course of 2 years of programming. Although research has started to examine if the skills developed in sport are indeed transferable to other life domains, few studies have examined the practical strategies used to effectively facilitate life skill transfer within youth programs.

It has been suggested that sport programs can foster transferable skills, yet it still remains unclear how these programs should be designed to best facilitate transference (Turnnidge et al., 2014). As such, the purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to examine whether participation in GJWHF was able to help female youth develop and transfer life skills to various life domains beyond the program and (b) to identify practical strategies perceived by youth that effectively facilitated transference.

Method

Context

The Girls Just Wanna Have Fun (GJWHF) program, a physical activity-based life skills program, was developed and implemented for female youth from low-income families between the ages of 11 and 16 within a Boys and Girls Club (BGC) in Eastern Ontario, Canada. The program was developed in partnership with a team of researchers and a local Boys and Girls Club in response to an identified gender gap in BCG programming, highlighting that significantly more males were participating in sport and physical activity programs than females. The main objectives of GJWHF were to (a) provide physical activity opportunities, (b) facilitate life skill development, and (c) enable opportunities for youth voice (for complete program description; see BLIND FOR REVIEW). The GJWHF program takes on a youth-driven
approach which incorporates the facilitation of meaningful youth involvement, providing youth with choice and opportunities to plan (e.g., choice of physical activity type and snack, opportunities to plan and lead their own life skill activity to younger youth within the club; Coakley, 2011; Education Alliance, 2007).

The GJWHF program structure is largely based on Hellison’s (1995, 2011) Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model and incorporates life skills activities from Danish et al.’s (2004) Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER) program model. The TPSR model focuses on developing a strong leader-participant relationship that enables gradual youth empowerment (Hellison, Martinek, Walsh, & Holt, 2008). The GJWHF program integrated the five levels of the TPSR model (personal responsibility, effort, self-coaching, leadership, transference). For example, leaders encouraged youth to work towards these levels (e.g., putting forth their best effort, taking responsibility for their actions), provided opportunities for youth to practice these skills throughout the program, and worked to explain how and why this was important (transfer). As part of the TPSR structure, a group debrief was used to conclude each session whereby leaders and youth discussed successes and challenges of the session. At this time, the leaders discussed with youth how and why the skills developed in the program could transfer to other domains. Accordingly, the GJWHF took on an explicit approach to life skills development and transfer.

Researchers have suggested that PYD programs should run for a period of at least 9 months with a minimum of 10 program sessions in order to best facilitate transference (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). Based on these suggestions, GJWHF ran once per week for 2 years from September to May. The first year of program implementation consisted of 30 sessions lasting 75 min in duration while the second year consisted of 27 sessions and
increased to 90 min (based on first year recommendations; BLIND FOR REVIEW). During both years, GJWHF was held at the same BGC location at no cost to participants and free transportation was also provided for youth to and from the clubhouse. Five female leaders were involved in each of the 2 years of programming with two leaders participating in both years of program implementation.

**Participants**

Female youth between the ages of 11 and 16 ($M$ age = 12.44, $SD = 1.32$) from two different BGC locations met at one clubhouse per week and attended GJWHF over the course of 2 years. Youth participants (hereafter referred to as ‘youth’) were from low-income families in a major city in Eastern Ontario. Youth involvement in the BGC ranged from 1 month to 9 years. There were 10 consistent youth (attended more than 75% of the sessions) in the first year and eight consistent youth who attended the program in the second year. Some youth dropped out over the course of 2 years of programming due to competing alternatives within the clubhouse.

All youth who participated in the program, regardless of participation rates, were invited to partake in the research and were provided with parental consent and youth assent forms. A total of 11 interviews (five in year 1, six in year 2) were conducted with youth who returned parental consent forms over the 2 years of GJWHF (see Table 1 for complete breakdown of youth). Four youth were involved in the program for both years, three of whom were interviewed at two time points (at the end of the first and second years of programming). Despite the researchers’ efforts, scheduling conflicts arose when arranging an interview with the one remaining youth and thus this youth was only interviewed at the end of the second year. Four youth participated in the program for 1 year (two in year 1, two in year 2). It should be noted that participation in the
research was not required for participation in the program and it was stated on the consent and
assent forms that participation in the research was voluntary.

**Procedure and Interview Guide**

Within the context of youth programs, particularly with TPSR-based programs, many
individuals involved are community-engaged professors acting in a dual role: program leader and
researcher (e.g., Hellison & Walsh, 2002; Ward & Parker, 2013). This study utilized this
approach as the first and second authors were directly involved in GJWHF as program leaders
and also aided in the program evaluation (e.g., conducting youth interviews). The first author
was involved in program development and implementation over the course of the 2 years of
GJWHF and the second author was involved in the second year of implementation. Interviews
were conducted by these authors as it has been argued that youth are more likely to open up to an
individual with whom they know and trust, compared to an independent interviewer (Heath,
Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009).

Following ethical approval from the affiliated institution’s Office of Research Ethics and
Integrity, parental consent forms were distributed prior to the start of GJWHF and assent forms
were completed by all youth. A number of steps were taken in order to reduce social desirability
effects. First, youth were assured that their responses would remain confidential and were
reminded the study was voluntary in nature. Second, youth were told that the objective of the
study was simply to gather their perspectives of their involvement in GJWHF and that there were
no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. Lastly, youth were made aware that the interview was not an
evaluation and would not affect their involvement in the program in any way. While youth did
provide examples of things they did not like about the program because the purpose of this
manuscript was on the transference of life skills (inherently positive skills), the negative
experiences were analyzed and reported elsewhere (see Bean, Forneris, & Halsall, 2014; Bean, Kendellen, Halsall, & Forneris, 2015).

A total of 11 semi-structured interviews ($M$ age = 13.7, $SD = 1.1$) were conducted with eight youth over the course of 2 years of programming. Five interviews were conducted at the end of the first year of program implementation and six interviews were conducted at the end of the second year. During both years, youth were interviewed one week after GJWHF was over at a BGC location.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, as Smith and Osborn (2008) have argued they allow for flexibility, facilitation of rapport, and the ability to have in-depth discussions producing rich data. The interview guide was developed based on an extensive review of the PYD and programming literature (e.g., Catalano et al., 2002; Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005). The interview guide was modified slightly from the first to second year based on the analysis of first year data, including minor adjustments and follow-up questions. The interview guide aimed to explore youths’ insights of how participation in GJWHF has potentially impacted their life skill development and further aided in the transference of these life skills to other domains (e.g., “What did you learn by being involved in the program?”; “What skills have you learned in the program?”; “Do you plan to use the skills you’ve learned in the program in your life?”; “How do you think that skill will help you at school? At home? With friends?”; “What within GJWHF helped you to apply the skill to youth life?”). Probes were used to further explore areas of youth experiences (e.g., “Can you give me an example of what you mean?”).

Interviews were recorded using a digital audio-recorder and lasted from 26 to 45 min ($M = 31:33$).

Data Analysis and Results
Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first two authors, resulting in 161 pages of transcripts (12-point font, single-spaced). Triangulation of the data was utilized, as data were gathered at multiple time points providing in-depth accounts (Maxwell, 2004). An inductive thematic analysis was conducted following the iterative six-step procedure specified by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the transcripts were read and reread to become familiar with the data. Second, meaningful extracts of data were identified and assigned initial codes (e.g., emotional regulation, respect, physical activity). Third, codes were grouped by content into overarching themes (e.g., interpersonal skills). Fourth, themes were reviewed to ensure their internal homogeneity (data within themes share common features) and external heterogeneity (themes are distinct from one another). During this step, investigator triangulation was used (Denzin, 1984), whereby a third independent researcher, a professor who helped to develop GJWHF, but was not involved in program delivery or data collection and had expertise in thematic analysis, examined whether the identified themes were consistent with the data collected and verified that codes and themes were accurately represented. The three researchers met to discuss any coding discrepancies. Minor discrepancies occurred (e.g., labelling of themes, placement of quotes under themes) which were discussed among the researchers until agreement was reached. These changes occurred in the fifth step, when themes were refined by assigning specific names to the themes, with particular emphasis placed on ensuring that each theme was consistent with the findings within the overall data set. The sixth step involved writing the manuscript, whereby researchers selected the quotes that they believe best reflected the participants’ lived experiences, in line with the purpose of the study.

The results are organized in three main sections according to life skills youth believed they transferred from participating in GJWHF including (a) intrapersonal skills, (b) interpersonal
skills, and (c) physical activity. Within each section, subthemes are outlined as well as the strategies used by program leaders to explicitly teach the development and transfer of life skills are described, where appropriate. Pseudonyms were created to protect participants’ rights to anonymity. Table 2 outlines activities utilized within GJW HF, youth perceptions of life skills learned, and contexts in which the life skills were transferred.

Intrapersonal skills. The youth spoke of how participation in GWHF helped facilitate the development and transference of several intrapersonal skills, such as emotional regulation, focus, and goal setting. For the purposes of this study, emotional regulation is defined as exercising control over one’s emotions; focus is directing one’s attention and effort towards a specific task; and goal setting is the process of deciding what one wants, planning how to get it, and working towards it.

Emotional regulation. Many youth discussed how during their involvement in GJWHF they believed they developed skills to manage their emotions, which could be applied in other areas of their lives. Emily, who was involved in the first year of GJWHF, highlighted that during her involvement in the program she believed she learned the value of being able to control her emotions: “The leaders taught you how to relax …like when you’re mad, how to control yourself and I think that it’s very important because when I got mad at some people it [emotional regulation skills] helped me.” Emily commented on how she believed the emotional regulation skills learned in GJWHF have transferred and helped her manage her frustrations at school: “I use it [emotional regulation skills] now because at school I got really mad and I just breathed three times and I went to the washroom for two minutes and then I came back and everything was fine.” Other youth mentioned how GJWHF taught them that physical activity itself could be used as an activity to help manage stress. For example, Amina, who participated in the second
year of GJWHF, believed she has been able to use the emotional regulation skills learned in the program to manage stressful situations at home, specifically by using dance:

At GJWHF, we learned that when we were trying to communicate with people that get you mad, to just walk away or go by yourself and do stuff that calm you down. With my brother, he gets mad so much and I just go downstairs and I dance it off. I dance off all the stress and madness he puts me through…It’s controlling my temper.

Amina also believed the emotional regulation skills transferred to school:

At school, I have to control my temper, it’s hard, but it works. This morning, at school, this guy kept trying to tell me off, so I just started breathing, sat down and I ignored him. We learned this [at GJWHF] when we were learning how to communicate with people.

Several youth shared tangible examples of the activities that the program leaders used to explicitly facilitate the development and transfer of emotional regulation. First, youth spoke of how the leaders taught deep breathing techniques to encourage youth to take deep breaths when feeling upset and/or frustrated. Second, the leaders encouraged youth to think about one’s body as a bowl of cooked spaghetti to try and relax. Laura, who participated in both years of GJWHF, described how she applied these breathing and relaxation techniques in her daily life:

Relaxation was a key one that we learned in the program. When we did breathing – tighten your body and then relax it out—it taught me how to relax more. If you’re in a bad situation and you’re not relaxed, you loosen up your body then that helps you relax.

Laura also shared an example of how learning emotional regulation skills in GJWHF was a skill that transferred and helped her remain calm when writing tests at school: “I had a test the other day and I actually used it [breathing exercise] and it actually worked! I got calmer and I was good with the test and I was like ‘whoa it works!’” Additionally, Julie, who was involved in
GJWHF for both years, discussed one activity in which youth made Power Bracelets where they picked one positive word (e.g., relax, confidence, focus) that they could identify with and made a bracelet with this word on it. Although the primary goal of this activity fell within the skills of self-talk and thought control, the words youth picked for themselves had various meanings and helped with several life skills that had been incorporated within the program. Julie mentioned how the bracelet reminded her to use breathing exercises when she felt frustrated at school:

“Whenever my teacher would get me mad, I would just sigh, then I know she can’t get to me because I’m looking at my bracelet and I’m calming down. I use my breathing too.”

**Focus.** Additionally, youth discussed how GJWHF helped them to develop focus. For example, Laura mentioned how she believed her involvement in GJWHF helped her learn how to focus on the specific task at hand which she has transferred and helped her complete her homework:

It [GJWHF] taught me to focus on one thing at a time and then go to another. I have six different classes so I have different assignments and I used to focus on two different assignments, but now [after GJWHF] I think it’s better to focus on just one, get that done and then move on.

To explicitly teach focus, youth completed the Focus Grid activity, where they were provided with a paper containing a grid of numbers in which they had to focus and locate various numbers in the grid within a certain amount of time. After doing the activity a few times, the leaders distracted the youth by making noises (e.g., banging on tables, yelling, humming) to encourage youth to try focus and in order to find the numbers on the grid despite distractions. Kayla, who was involved in GJWHF for both years, highlighted what she learned from this activity:
At one point it was quiet and then at another point there was banging on the tables which made it more difficult. When it’s too loud it’s harder to focus and if I’m loud during a class it’s harder to focus and then I’m disrupting other people’s learning… the focus one [activity] shows if I’m being disruptive I’ll be distracting to my peers whether you notice it or not and some people have to improve on that, like I have improved on that.

Kayla went on to discuss how she applied what she learned from this activity to other contexts in her life: “I have used it [focus] a couple times, but I know I should use it more because sometimes I am a disruption at school, not meaningfully though.”

**Goal setting.** To facilitate goal setting, the leaders organized an activity referred to as Dare to Dream in which youth had to write down one of their dreams and describe the goals they needed to set in order to achieve this particular dream. Sara, who participated in both years of GJWHF, described how her dream was to be a chef and that to be successful she learned the importance of practicing her cooking skills on a regular basis: “When I grow up I want be a chef. I want be like Gordon Ramsay [famous chef]. I want to have my own cooking shows, so to do that I cook every night. I keep that goal alive.” Similarly, Sara specified how learning to set goals in GJWHF was a lesson that transferred and helped her set goals at school: “I set a goal to do better in academics… last time I got an 82% in visual arts but now I’m working towards 90%.”

When asked if the program made Julie think differently about herself or her future, she outlined the importance of setting goals:

Yes, the leaders taught me how to make goals and then I follow those goals to my future… so when we did our goals… we did it at least twice or three times in the program so then you get more used to it, so then the goal is finally reached… constantly working
towards it. One goal I remember specifically because I’m still working on it is to get in an elevator without freaking out because I hate elevators.

Lastly, Kayla identified that the use of debriefs at the end of each session helped her to facilitate the transfer of intrapersonal skills: “We would reflect on how self-control and confidence—you know, at the end—we would reflect on how we participated in the program that day, what we learned, and how we could use it.”

**Interpersonal skills.** Interpersonal skills, including respect, responsibility, and social skills were identified by youth as skills learned within the program and transferred to various life domains. For the purposes of this study, respect is defined as showing consideration, courtesy, and care for someone or something; responsibility is being accountable and being answerable to one’s actions; and the development of social skills refers to the ability to interact and communicate with others.

**Respect.** According to the interviews, youth indicated how respect was an important skill they learned during their participation in GJWHF and subsequently transferred and applied in other domains. Most youth felt that they learned how to act in a respectful manner by showing consideration for others’ feelings. Kristen, who was involved in the first year of GJWHF, felt that the program taught her how to respect others by appreciating diversity. Specifically, Kristen spoke of one specific activity where a photographer came into GJWHF to take the girls’ pictures to be used in a scrapbook with the goal of increasing confidence and empowering the girls:

I learned a lot about accepting differences; that not everyone functions or acts the same way…so it’s helped me accept that everyone has their own differences, their own qualities and strengths. When we were taking the pictures, it made me realize this because I was looking at everybody’s pose and was like ‘wow everybody’s pose is
different; they’re not like mine they’re not going to have the same smile as me or the

same eyes.’ It sort of made me realize that if everybody’s poses are different that means

they’re different so why not accept it.

Kristen further elaborated on how she believed she has internalized the life skill of respect,

which has transferred and helped her demonstrate respect for her peers at school:

You have people who are so alone and teased every day because they look or act
different. It’s made me realize ‘what has she done wrong?’ I used to be part of that, but

then [after GJWHF] I was like ‘what was the point of doing that it’s really not worth it.’

Emily specified how the program leaders modelled respectful behavior which helped her

internalize this skill and apply it other areas of her life:

I now respect others by listening better, if they’re [friends, teachers] talking to me, I will
listen and not talk to somebody else. In the program, the leaders respected you when you
were talking and they asked others not to speak because they want to show you respect. I
think that helps me because if they show respect, I should show respect to others too.

Emily further emphasized how the program helped her to understand respect, specifically as it
relates to being grateful when others do nice things for her:

When the girls group [GJWHF] gave us things, like snacks and lip gloss, you appreciate
and respect it and you don’t just throw it away, you say ‘thank you’. So at school and at
my house and with my friends, when people give me something or do something nice for
me, I wouldn’t just disown it or wouldn’t care, I’d be thankful and respect them for it.

Sara described how during the Rose and Thorn activity, a relational activity done at the
beginning of each program session in which youth share one rose (something good that happened
that week) and one thorn (something not so good that happened that week), helped her learn how
to respect her peers:

When we were in the circle and did something we weren’t supposed to, we had to come
forward and say what we did; you had to own up to what you did. When we were having
the group discussions you had to be respectful to whoever’s talking, not interrupt them.

Sara went on to discuss how she applied the respectful behaviors learned at GJWHF when
playing basketball: “When we play basketball, we can’t be rude to the refs or other players. If we
see something, say double dribble, you can’t just stop the game—I’m not the ref, I’m a player—
so you just let that person do their job.”

**Responsibility.** Moreover, Sara indicated how she applied respect and responsibility in
her daily life: “I use this at home because when my mom needs help, I would respect her and
step up and help her with the dishes.” Additionally, Kayla discussed how taking more
responsibility has helped her in three contexts of her life:

Responsibility has helped me at school because it has pushed me to do my homework
because that’s my responsibility. At home, to not forget my homework and to do it and
get my tests signed. And it has helped me with my friends more because before I would
get detention at lunch and my friends have gone to recess. So now I’m not sitting in class
going in trouble anymore, I can actually spend time with them.

Kristen discussed how she developed a sense of responsibility regarding how to act in public:

The program has [helped me] when it comes to teamwork and we have group activities or
even if we’re going out in public, there’s a sense of responsibility there that we have to
take and then actions we have to do. There are certain ways you can act and certain ways
you can’t act. There are certain ways to speak and certain ways not to speak.
Lastly, when asked how the program has helped her transfer the skill of responsibility to other life contexts, Julie discussed the importance of debriefing: “Just taking the time in the program to reflect on different characteristics about yourself made me think about it a little bit more, you know, in my life.”

**Social skills.** The findings also illustrate how the opportunities to socialize and work cooperatively with other youth in GJWHF helped the youth develop social skills. Laura explained how the activity Knights, Horses, and Cavaliers, a cooperative game done in pairs, helped her to be more inclusive and work as a team: “Teamwork helped me with my friends, to not leave people out in sports. With family too, when you go outside, you ask your brother if he wants to go, you don’t just leave and not ask, you include others.” Moreover, some youth talked about how GJWHF provided them with opportunities to meet and socialize with other youth. For example, Laura mentioned how the leaders divided the group into smaller groups which forced her to socialize with new people: “It [GJWHF] helped me because I wasn’t always with my friends, I was with other people because the leaders separated us [into groups] so I talked with other people.” Furthermore, Sara also recognized this change in Laura over the course of GJWHF and noted:

[Laura], she improved. Like before she’s ‘oh, I don’t like this person because of their appearance’, but now she actually understands that you can’t judge someone on how they look. She now judges them on personality and knows to be nice and approach them.

Julie talked about how the program helped her gain confidence pertaining to her social skills which has helped her act in a confident manner in her everyday life:

I used to shy away from participating and now, after the program, I’m not that shy anymore. I’m not afraid to speak out anymore. It [GJWHF] helped me, like I think all the
stuff we went through, the focus and empowerment activities…it helped me to overcome
my fear and now I’m not so shy.

When participating in the Power Bracelets activity previously described, Emily mentioned how
she wrote the word ‘brave’ on her bracelet to encourage her to try new things which was a lesson
that transferred and helped her take initiative to communicate her ideas at school:

We made the bracelets and wrote a word on it, I put ‘brave’…In class I wouldn’t usually
answer any questions, but now if I know the question I will just put my hand up and I will
get some credit for it. I find myself more confident too, like I find myself looking at my
bracelet…sometimes I’d just look at my bracelet and remember that I am brave and that I
should be brave when I do stuff that I don’t want to.

Lastly, Sara discussed how she gained confidence in her social
skills from participating in
GJWHF: “I never thought I would have the courage to actually go up to a person and introduce
myself, but with GJWHF I wasn’t forced, I was encouraged and acknowledged to lead and
interact with people, which made it easier.” Sara further highlighted how she has used this skill
to meet new people while camping: “There is a girl at my campsite, she was new to the site, so I
just saw her trailer pull up and then just asked her if she wanted to go to the park.”

**Physical activity.** Many youth spoke of how they learned to enjoy being physically
activity during GJWHF which was a skill that transferred and helped them engage in physical
activity outside of the program. Laura mentioned how playing basketball for the first time in
GJWHF was a fun experience that shaped her decision to play basketball in her community:

Before GJWHF I didn’t really play basketball and then we played basketball at the
program and it was fun and now I started doing it here [BGC]. In the summer time I’m
Likewise, Bailey, who participated in the second year of GJWHF, described how she enjoyed playing a wide range of sports in GJWHF because it provided her with opportunities to socialize and work collaboratively with other youth. She discussed how playing sports was a positive experience that transferred and encouraged her to join sport teams in her community:

GJWHF made me feel pumped up about joining sports teams and it helped because I want to join more sports team when I’m older like hockey, soccer, basketball because working together with other people is actually fun and you get to know them and can become really great friends. The program made me think about maybe starting to do more sports—actually I have started another program, a [community] hockey program.

Finally, Julie spoke of how she developed an interest for physical activity during her participation in GJWHF which was an important lesson that transferred and helped her to be physically active during afterschool hours: “Usually when I go home I’d just sit down and play on my phone, but now [after GJWHF] I like to go outside and play and interact with my neighbors or my sister.” Julie later provided a tangible example of how she believed the physical competencies she developed through her involvement in GJWHF transferred and helped her run further distances in physical education classes. She described how she felt proud of this accomplishment: “At school we have a track and since the program, I can run a lap and a half without stopping. It makes me feel good…I improved on that because before I wouldn’t even be able to run one lap.”

Discussion
The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to examine whether the GJWHF program was able to help female youth develop and transfer life skills to various life domains beyond the program and (b) to identify practical strategies perceived by youth that effectively facilitated transference. Findings from this study indicated that youth believed they were able to develop and transfer life skills from participating in the program. More specifically, the youth believed they were able to transfer intrapersonal skills (e.g., emotional regulation, focus, and goal setting), interpersonal skills (e.g., respect, responsibility, and social skills), and physical activity skills to contexts beyond GJWHF which included school, home, peer group, and other sport environments. A unique aspect of this study is that findings extend an understanding of how community-based youth programming contexts can facilitate life skill transfer, as research has predominantly been conducted within the context of school. Findings from this study indicated numerous contexts in which youth believed they were able to transfer life skills to outside of GJWHF which may speak to the benefit as using a community-based context instead of a school-based context where transference may be more limited to the school environment.

Moreover, as GJWHF ran for 2 consecutive years, analyzing data from both years of programming allowed for a better understanding of the practical strategies that youth believed were effective in helping them learn transferable skills. The findings of the current study support previous research that has emphasized the importance of intentionally teaching life skills to foster greater likelihood that youth are able to transfer skills (Danish et al., 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008; Martinek et al., 2001). This study is in line with past research in which deliberately facilitating transfer within youth programs has led to positive outcomes for youth (Hayden et al., 2015; Hellison & Walsh, 2002; Walsh et al., 2010). Moreover, results support
previous findings from Weiss et al. (2013) as youth within The First Tee were able to transfer skills learned in golf to contexts, such as school, home, with friends, and in the workplace.

One of the novel contributions of this study was documenting the specific activities youth believed to be useful in GJWHF to facilitate life skill transfer which can be utilized by other programmers. One of the main strategies used to intentionally teach life skills within the program context was the activities used to introduce and provide opportunities to practice the skills. For youth to gain the confidence and awareness necessary to successfully transfer skills, researchers have argued that a deliberate approach should be taken by providing concrete examples throughout the program session of how the life skills can be applied beyond the program (Danish et al., 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008). In the current study, youth discussed specific activities in which they believed were crucial in the facilitation of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills in other contexts, such as learning breathing techniques pertinent in emotional regulation, making Power Bracelets as a reminder for self-talk and emotional regulation, and participating in the Dare to Dream activity to practice setting goals. These activities were integrated into programming specifically to take on an explicit approach to life skill development. Furthermore, throughout these activities, leaders provided examples and created tangible links between the activities and external life contexts, with the goal of increasing youths’ awareness of contexts in which such skills can be applied. As previous studies have recognized the importance of utilizing teachable moments (Camiré et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2010), the current study reinforces the importance of not only taking opportunities that arise, but also ensuring leaders facilitate such opportunities regularly to reinforce skills.

In line with this, an effective strategy found within this study was the importance of conducting a debrief at the end of a program session. Specifically, the debriefs (ranging from 5 to
10 min) were held as a group at the end of the program session and were used to summarize the life skills and facilitate informal discussions moderated by the leader on how these skills could be applied to other life domains (e.g., What skill(s) did you learn today; Where could you apply these skills in your life? How?). This finding is consistent with past research by Walsh et al. (2010) which outlined the importance of integrating discussions throughout the program related to skill transfer to other life contexts. Engaging youth in these debriefs and the process of reflection has been shown to increase the likelihood of successful transfer (Allen et al., 2015; Gould & Carson, 2008; Weiss et al., 2013). Therefore, having youth be actively engaged in the debrief may help them personally relate to their life experiences and contexts, while leaders play an active and supportive role in this process. Similarly, findings from Allen et al. (2015) indicated the use of focus groups, as part of the reflection process, enabled youth to share knowledge with their peers, which youth believed to be more beneficial than simply having the leaders’ communicate the same information. As such, results from this study may provide initial evidence of the value of incorporating an explicit approach, such as a structured debrief, that addressed various contexts in which life skills can be transferred. Therefore, incorporating an interactive debrief would be a useful practical recommendation for future programmers, including GJWHF leaders.

Findings from this study reinforce the importance of utilizing a sport and/or physical activity context for female youth programming as youth in GJWHF were previously identified as not engaging in physical activity programming within the BGC. This finding may speak to the unique sample utilized within this study, while most studies exploring life skill transfer in youth programming have targeted solely male or mixed-genders participants, this is one of the first studies to explore solely female youth perspectives. Therefore, utilizing this environment helped
female youth develop physical activity competence as it was acknowledged that participation in GJWHF was a catalyst for further sport and physical activity participation. As such, facilitating opportunities for the development of physical activity competence helps in the facilitation of physical activity participation in adulthood (Telama et al., 2005), particularly in female youth from families living on low-incomes as this group has the lowest rates of physical activity (Gray et al., 2014). Moreover, the transfer of social skills may be particularly relevant for youth in this study, as female youth has been known to value relationships and social connections (Coleman, Cox, & Roker, 2008; Jordan, 2013; Meyers, 2003) and the environment fostered within GJWHF may have been effective in developing such skills (BLIND FOR REVIEW).

The delivery of a well-structured program is crucial for youth engagement and development. Specifically, the utilization of a youth-driven approach, including providing opportunities for leadership, was acknowledged by youth as important in the development and transference of social skills. Using the TPSR model as one of the primary frameworks in GJWHF helped facilitate this, as a key value in this model is providing the youth with gradual empowerment throughout the program, which includes leadership opportunities (Hellison et al., 2008). Previous studies conducted with GJWHF have identified this as an imperative component to program success (BLIND FOR REVIEW), yet this is one of the first empirical studies to outline how particular strategies within a youth-driven program can not only foster life skill development, but also transference. Turnnidge et al. (2014) acknowledge having a solely adult-driven approach may not be the best approach, and as such, GJWHF utilized a combination of youth- and adult-driven approaches; however, future research should aim to further explore what the optimal balance is between these two approaches. Additionally, having clear rules and expectations outlined for the group was important, as youth discussed the importance of
understanding how to behave as part of the GJWHF group in public was critical in transferring the life skill of respect. In line with this, youth discussed the importance of the program leaders modelling respectful behavior which impacted the youth and their influence on transference. This reinforces the importance of external assets (Weiss et al., 2013; Petitpas et al., 2005).

Lastly, although not identified as a specific strategy for facilitating transfer, the length of program itself may have helped influence skill transference. As mentioned, Catalano et al. (2004) suggest that youth development programs should be implemented for a minimum of 10 sessions over the course of 9 months to aid in life skills transference. The current study examined a program that ran for 9 months over the course of 2 years, with a total of 57 implemented program sessions, which could help to explain youth’s positive experiences with life skills transference within this program. Similar findings have been found by Walsh et al. (2010) who evaluated a 2-year, 45 session TPSR-based program in which many participants outlined the ability to transfer skills learned within the program to external contexts.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was successful in understanding if and what strategies were used within GJWHF to develop and facilitate life skill transfer for youth over 2 years of programming, yet there were limitations. First, as is often the case in program evaluations, there is potential for social desirability as program leaders conducted youth interviews which had the potential for influence. To minimize this several steps outlined above were taken to minimize social desirability when conducting the interviews. However, as earlier mentioned, youth are often more likely to open up to an individual they know, rather than an independent interviewer (Heath et al., 2009). Second, the data were based on participant self-report through the use of interviews and therefore results were based on perceptions as opposed to observational data. Third, although
the data collected were from youth who consistently participated in the program, in some cases for 2 years, the data are based on one particular program with a relatively small sample size. Therefore, the generalizability of the results are limited. Based on the findings of this study, there are also a number of future directions for research on transfer such as further understanding the transference of skills to multiple life contexts, barriers to life skill transfer, and how leaders can balance using an explicit approach to teach transfer while still incorporating a youth-driven approach.

In conclusion, this is the first known study to look at all female youth and one of few studies that examined transfer beyond the context of school and to multiple contexts. Furthermore, it has been argued that the TPSR model is an exemplary youth development model; however few studies have provided sufficient empirical findings of transference efficacy beyond the scope of the delivered program (Walsh et al., 2010). This study provides evidence for this identified gap. The applied nature of this study highlights practical strategies for programmers on how to facilitate life skill transfer within a youth program. It is critical to have training to teach program leaders how to intentionally integrate life skills within such programs, teaching not only the importance of facilitating transfer throughout program sessions, but also outlining how to facilitate this process by using strategies outlined in this study (e.g., intentional life skills activities, interactive debrief). Moving forward, it is our hope that researchers and practitioners can take these strategies and integrate them into programming to help youth learn life skills and apply these skills in multiple life domains in which they engage.
References


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Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Number of interviews (year 1, year 2, both)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amina</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>1 (year 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Examples of activities utilized within GJWHF with youth perceptions of life skills learned and contexts, outside of the program, to which youth identified as successfully transferring the life skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities utilized within GJWHF</th>
<th>Activity description</th>
<th>Life skills learned</th>
<th>Contexts of life skill transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rose and thorn</td>
<td>Group activity in which youth share one positive and one challenging experience that occurred that week</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep breathing</td>
<td>Youth learn how to take deep breaths to relax</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spaghetti exercise&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Youth imagine themselves feeling like spaghetti</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>School; Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power bracelets&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Youth design a bracelet with a word they believe will be most helpful to them in tough situations</td>
<td>Positive self-talk; Emotional regulation</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus grid&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Youth focus and locate various numbers on a paper containing a grid of numbers within a certain amount of</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dare to dream  Youth write down their dreams and discuss them with other youth  Goal Setting;  School  
Knights, horses, cavaliers  A cooperative game that emphasizes teamwork, social support, and communication  Social Skills - Teamwork;  Home; Peer  
Photographs  Youth had opportunity to have portfolio pictures taken by a photographer  Respect;  School; Peer  
Integrating  Sport/Physical activity component was integrated into every session. Youth were provided with the choice as to what activity they wanted to engage in  Physical activity;  Sport/Physical activity;  
