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Danielle Belcher

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The Effects of Uniforms on Youths' Body Image in the Junior Lifeguard Program

Danielle Belcher, Danielle Wong, & Dr. Megan Stellino

School of Sport & Exercise Science



Introduction

Uniforms can be a means to emphasize an athlete's body, and can therefore, increase awareness of their body image (Earlynn et al. 2018). Body image is the self-perception of how one's body looks and can have many developmental consequences (Charlette, 2010). The increased awareness of body image has been studied in college and professional athletes, but very few studies have been done investigating these effects in youth (Charlette, 2010).

The Junior Lifeguard (JG) program uniforms are designed for both water and land activities since much of the education in the program involves mock classroom teaching and then direct application through activity.



Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate parent's perception of youth uniforms worn in the JG Program.

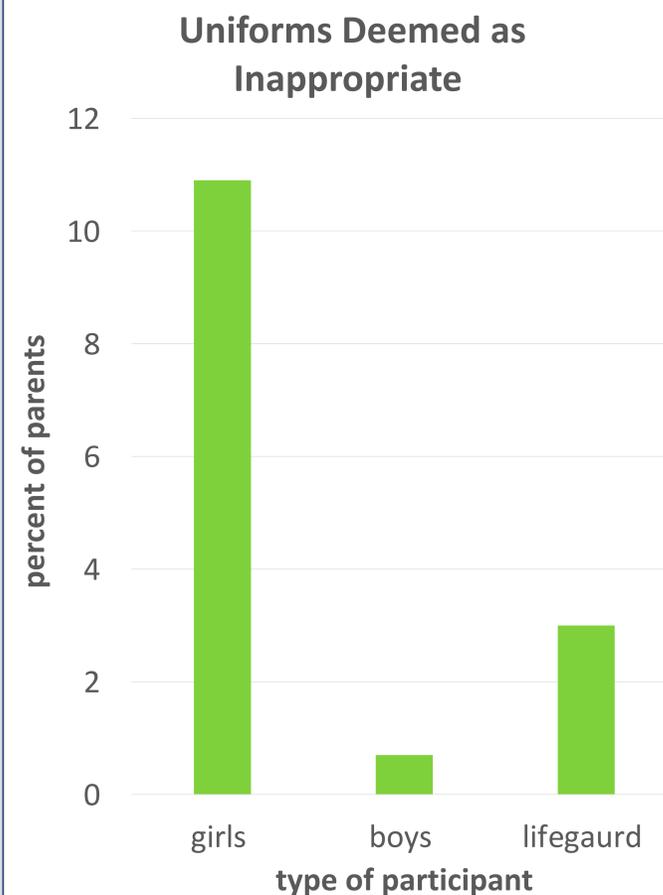
1. What are parents' perceptions of the JG youth uniforms?
2. How are the parents' perceptions different among boys, girls, and instructors' uniforms?

Methods

Parents (N=158) from the Junior Lifeguard (JG) program were asked to share their perceptions of the program uniforms their children and the instructors wore during the programs. The items were in both in multiple choice and short answer format. The answers to the questions were synthesized onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and the qualitative responses from parents were then coded into quantitative data in order to perform a frequency analysis. A "0" represented responses that did not answer the question of appropriateness, a "1" was assigned for responses that indicated the uniforms were inappropriate, and a "2" was assigned for responses that indicated the uniforms were appropriate. The qualitative responses were coded by two researchers independently, and then together by a means of triangulation for a frequency analysis.

Results

After coding the survey answers and running a frequency analysis, the results showed that 0.6% of parents said boys' uniforms were inappropriate, while 9.5% of parents said girls' uniforms were inappropriate, and 2.5% of parents said that the lifeguards' uniforms were inappropriate.



	Parents' qualitative responses
Girl uniforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Unacceptably sexist. Very high cut one piece suit or super tiny two piece bikini." • "gets skimpy on older girls" • "Girls could be more covered up."
Boy uniforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • " boys-no different that a regular swim suit, it's just blue" • "Normal for boys"
Lifeguard uniforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • " Honestly the teenager girls have a lot showing and sometimes it's a little too much... The younger girls notice and wonder why they wear their suits like that. And of course, the boys notice."

Discussion & Conclusions

Uniforms in sport may be a means for athletes' bodies to be on display without intention. This can then, in turn, make athletes hyper-aware of their body image; especially how it may be perceived by the public. More parents perceived girl uniforms to be the most inappropriate, while parents indicated that boys' uniforms were appropriate. The difference in parental perceptions may be a reflection of societal expectations of how individuals should look based on gender identification. The JG's who participate may not necessarily be comfortable with what they have to wear, and from a parent's perspective, it is assumed they are comfortable and intend to look inappropriately in public.

These findings are important because this may have developmental implications for youth when developing conceptions and ideals about their bodies (Earlynn et al. 2018). If children have different societal pressures to look specific ways, it may create challenges in navigating through what they may personally prefer, compared to what they are encouraged to prefer in relation to one's body image and in particular contexts.

References

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