CREATING GENDER EQUITY IN A YOUTH-SERVING AGENCY: A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Gail Folaron, Ph.D., ACSW and Marie L. Watkins, Ph.D., ACSW, CSW
Indiana University School of Social Work
Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis

During the past two decades almost every major single-gender national youth organization has been forced to address the question, at the national policy level, of whether to provide services to both boys and girls. They are responding to lawsuits demanding access to programs, rising demand from families with school-age children who want youth services, philosophical considerations, and their own desire to increase membership (Carnegie, 1992, p.48).

In the past two decades most traditionally male youth organizations have become mixed-sex settings by starting new programs for girls or opening up their membership to include boys and girls (Carnegie, 1992). There is a lack of research, however, on whether the integration of girls into male-dominated arenas in youth-serving agencies has truly provided equitable access to services. While there exists some argument for mixed-sex and single-sex opportunities within youth-serving agencies, there is no definitive research base to conclude if one setting has advantages over the other for healthy youth development (Nickelson, 1992).

There also exists a paucity of research to guide youth agencies as they change from single-sex settings to mixed-sex programming (Nickelson, 1992). Issues of gender equity addressed in the current literature relate to the formal classroom setting, that is, teaching strategies (Higginbotham & Cannon, 1988), differential treatment of boys and girls in the classroom setting (Sadker & Sadker, 1991), and the negative impact of male-oriented curriculum development upon girls' self-esteem and academic achievement (American Association of University Women, 1990). This literature establishes a baseline of information for the formal classroom setting, which may not necessarily serve as a prototype for the informal programs of youth agencies.

This article describes the planned process of organizational change developed and implemented by one youth-serving agency. To illustrate the process of change, a model proposed by Hilke and ConwayGerhardt (1994) to eliminate gender inequality in schools is described. This four-stage cyclical model of awareness, analysis, action and assessment serves as a useful framework to explain the agency's journey to gender equity.

Youth-Serving Organizations

With over 400 national nonprofit, adult-sponsored youth organizations (Carnegie Council, 1992), millions of children and youth spend time away from school and family responsibilities in youth-serving agencies. The number of youth involved and the amount of time spent by youth in these agencies ranks second only to the public schools (Carnegie Council, 1992). It is estimated that an average junior high student spends 28.7 hours per week in school (Carnegie, 1992, p. 32) with 60 to 80 percent of these youth participating in at least one after-school activity, many in youth-serving organizations (Medrich & Marzke, 1991). Youth-serving organizations provide activities which promote leadership and social skills, positive use of leisure-time hours, educational and vocational achievement, and enhanced self-esteem. Recent studies have documented the positive out-comes of healthy development among youth members as a result of par-ticipation in the youth-service agencies, programs, and relationship-building opportunities. However, there is also research to suggest that there is an unintended impact of sexism in settings which provide servic-es to youth. Schools have been under attack since the 1960s for sexist classroom environments and teaching methods which place girls at a dis-advantage (e.g., see American Association of University Women, 1995, 1990). Researchers correlate reduced self-esteem and confidence among girls in their adolescent years related to their marginalization in the class-room (Fine, 1986, Brown & Gilligan, 1991). Youth clubs and after-school activities have been understudied in the United States but research on youth clubs in England suggests sexism continues to be a problem result-ing in reduced participation among girls (Griffiths, 1995; Nava, 1984; Camden Area Youth Committee, 1982 as cited in McRobbie & Nava, 1984; Youth Work Unit, 1981 as cited in Griffiths, 1995).

An Example of Organizational Change

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Indianapolis (B&GCI), formerly the Boys Club Association of Indianapolis, changed its one-hundred-year organi-zational mission to add girls into full membership in January, 1992. A multi-year plan was developed and implemented to bring girls into full and equal membership with the boys and to create a gender-equitable environment in which all members would feel comfortable. The change, described by the staff as "the journey to gender equity," was gradual. The first three years of the journey focused on staff development, structural changes to the facilities, and administrative measures to ensure account-able practice. Initial strategies to move the journey included intensive training on sexism, racism and homophobia; development of gender-equity statements to guide programming; and an action research compo-nent which provided the staff with opportunities for ongoing reflection and feedback. Future plans include curriculum development to ensure

comparable and consistent training of all staff and volunteers, further pro-
gram development, and recruitment and retention of adolescent girls.
The initial plan for change is described below using the four-stage cycli-
cal model of awareness, analysis, action and assessment to eliminate gen-
der inequity.

Awareness
    Hilke & ConwayGerhardt (1994) suggest that the first task in chang-
ing to a gender-equitable environment is to create an awareness of the
inequities and to devise a plan to promote gender equity. They state:

> As part of the plan, staff, students, families, and commu-
> nity members should learn about ways that students are
> treated differently in their home, schools, and communi-
> ties based on their gender. Discussion should include
> potential negative consequences of gender inequity and
> ways to make positive change. (p. 18)

    To this end, three years of intensive training were provided to all
agency staff, including administrative, program, and support personnel.
Shorter in-service trainings, readings, and presentations were provided to
the corporate board. The primary purpose of the trainings was to create
awareness of gender inequity as a concept, to help staff and board mem-
bers recognize gender inequities in the club units and understand its con-
sequences, and to help individuals become aware of their own personal
contributions to gender oppression.
    Trainings, as well as subsequent changes in the facilities, program-
ming, and budget were informed by youth development literature
(Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995, 1992; Center for
Youth Development and Policy Research, 1994; Pittman & Fleming, 1991;
and Konopka, 1976); research findings on sexism and gender inequity in
the schools (Association of American University Women, 1995, 1992, 1990;
Sadker & Sadker, 1991; Fine, 1988; Sadker, Sadker & Shakeshaft, 1989);
theories of adolescent biopsychosocial development with an emphasis on
female development (Watkins, 1995; Ward & Taylor, 1992; Gilligan, Brown
& Rogers, 1990; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hammer, 1990; Koff, Rierdan & Stubbs,
1990; Gilligan, 1990; Simmons, Blyth & McKinney, 1983; Tanner, 1972) and
self-in-relation theory (Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1976).
    To build ownership for the change while building awareness, staff
were given opportunities at trainings, focus groups, staff meetings, and
during evaluation interviews and feedback to express frustrations with
the change and to reflect on gender equity. It was a costly and timely
process but the results include a dedicated staff who understand gender
discrimination and actively work toward its elimination.

Analysis

Analysis, the next task in the model, directs staff to take a serious look at their work site and determine where gender inequities exist. A multi-faceted review of the physical structures and the aesthetics of the facilities, the crafting and scheduling of activities, and the quality of the staff-youth interaction was conducted by members of the staff, the Program Committee of the corporate board of directors, and youth members. Staff reviewed written organizational materials, examined agency environments, paged through library materials, and monitored their personal interactions with boys and girls. Inequities were identified in use of space, wall displays, programmed activities, budgetary allocations, and written materials. The analysis stage was an ongoing process which led to dynamic changes within the organization.

Action

Analysis led to corrective action as gender inequities surfaced. The staff quickly learned that opening the door to girls was insufficient to create an inviting environment within a mixed-sex setting. To create a gender-equitable climate, facilities, aesthetics, and space allocation were redesigned; program scheduling and design strategies were expanded; budgetary resources were redistributed; and sexist staff-staff and staff-youth interpersonal interaction were addressed and corrected.

Facilities and Aesthetics

Two large rooms serve as the focal point of programming in each club unit, the gymnasium and the games room. The games room contains pool tables, video games, and foosball tables. Consistent with studies conducted in England, boys tend to dominate in these rooms (Griffiths, 1995; Youth Work Unit, 1981). Rather than attempt to break into the boys domain, many of the girls who entered the club congregate in the bathrooms or in the corners of the rooms where they can talk among themselves. Facility changes were necessary to meet the needs of girls. Influenced by self-in-relation theory, small meeting rooms were added as well as separate locker rooms and additional restrooms.

To create a gender-equitable environment, staff and youth members painted over old logos and added ethnically diverse posters and wall hangings of both men and women. The library was cleansed of all sexist, racist, and homophobic literature.

Programming

Staff revised program objectives, scheduling practices, and teaching strategies to be consistent with recent research on the developmental needs of girls. Core areas of programming were expanded beyond the competitive activities of the gymnasium and the games room with an

increased emphasis on citizenship-leadership development, cultural enrichment, and personal-educational development (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 1994; Carnegie Council, 1992).

Traditional "boys" programs were attractive to some girls who were eager to join the athletic teams and leagues. To encourage female participation within the gymnasium and the games room, girls were provided skill instructions for use of equipment and allocated special gym time and coaching. The boys were encouraged to decrease the aggressiveness of their play which appeared to scare away the girls. Despite all efforts, however, the gymnasium and games room remain male dominated.

The majority of girls preferred smaller group activities provided through cooperative play activities such as leadership programs and girls-only group clubs. Staff attempted nontraditional programming experiments such as girls-only fix-it clubs, bike clubs, and woodshop to encourage female participation in all areas of the club and to eliminate sexist barriers.

Budget

In an effort to be consistent with more responsive programming, purchases of new equipment and supplies were necessary. The major budgetary expense prior to the change was in athletic equipment and supplies because the clubs were known for their team sports, such as basketball, baseball, and football leagues. A summer baseball team, for example, would require baseball equipment, a coach, uniforms, and trophies. The cost ran in excess of $1000 per league.

Expanding an emphasis from athletics to a broader emphasis on several core areas required that the budget be reviewed and funds redistributed to other areas. Computers and equipment that appealed to girls, such as tumbling mats and karaoke machines, were purchased. The cost of these items required a change in funding priorities and ultimately resulted in a reduction in the area of sports accessories.

Interpersonal interactions between staff and youth

Fundamental to building a gender-equitable climate where all youth feel comfortable and self-esteem is enhanced are the interpersonal interactions between the members and the staff. Inclusive, nonsexist language and behavioral management strategies were carefully examined for vocabulary, tone, and attitude to eliminate sexist, exclusionary, and offensive interactions. The staff also monitored their behavior, vocabulary and staff-member interactions to remove sexist content. Staff behavior was monitored by means of self-analysis, peer intervention, and systematic coding of interactions with the members. Coding is an objective measure used by an observer to quantify the number and types of interactions between staff and members of each gender (Sadker & Sadker, 1991).

Efforts were made to alter communication that perpetuated sexist stereotypes or belittled girls. Expressions like "you throw like a girl" or "you shoot like a girl," were no longer permitted as athletic coaching strategies. In response to research which indicates that girls are more likely to be complimented for their appearance while boys were acknowledged for their accomplishments (Sadkers), staff altered their comments from, "Oh, don't you look cute today" to "I'm glad to see you today." Similarly, girls who are loud are simply told not to be so loud replacing the previous intervention of, "Girls shouldn't be so loud." Another strategy used was the use of gender-neutral words such as "youth" and "kids" which replaced the all-inclusive pronoun "guys." In addition, the staff attended to heterosexist vocabulary to ensure that children struggling with their sexuality were not alienated. For example, instead of asking a boy if he has a special girl in his life the staff would ask, "Do you have a special person in your life?"

Language, strategies, and techniques directed toward personal behavioral management skills also were altered. As staff dealt with the aggressive behavior of the male members, they also addressed positive behaviors and attempted to balance attentiveness across genders. Sexist language which attempts to put girls into passive roles such as, "I expect you to be a young lady" have been eliminated from remedial interactions. The staff continue to debate whether boys' and girls' behavior can and should be managed in the same way, however. Some staff believe all children should be treated equally, and the management of behavior should be based upon the severity of the infraction; others suggest that the genders are not the same and differential treatment is necessary.

Assessment

Assessment is the final stage of the cycle. Several assessment measures were developed and implemented at all levels of the organization to promote gender equity. Self-analysis and peer evaluations were used within individual agencies and gender-equity statements were developed by staff as accountability measures across programs and agencies. An outside researcher was hired to conduct a three-year qualitative evaluation of the process and progress of the journey. Student interns provided written observational data on interactions within the club. These research efforts provided ongoing feedback for the administration and staff. The results were used to inform training and improve the effectiveness of the programming.

The gender-equity statements are five pages of practice principles, written by staff with administrative guidance which address language, interactions, and programs within the six individual club units comprising the Boys and Girls Clubs. The programming section of these statements provides guidelines for promoting a gender-inclusive environment.

The gender equity statements include such provisions as: "There are sin-
gle-sex and coeducational programs available for all age groups ... there
are programs which provide instruction for skill development and mas-
tery for both boys and girls in six program core service areas," etc. These
statements serve as the foundation upon which seasonal programs are
planned and implemented.

The formative evaluation conducted by an outside researcher docu-
mented three years of change. Individual interviews were held with all
full-time staff on an annual basis and group interviews of staff were con-
ducted semiannually. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed
verbatim. Written transcripts were coded for patterns and themes, and
reports on the findings were regularly presented to the staff, administra-
tion and the board of directors. Staff were given copies of their transcripts
and copies of summary reports to amend if necessary prior to distribution
to the administrative team. All revised reports included recommenda-
tions for future action. The findings were used by staff as a source of feed-
back and by administration to inform ongoing training.

Discussion

Is it possible for a 100-year-old, male-dominated organization created
for the purpose of serving boys to reformat their programming to serve
both boys and girls in an equitable manner? The Boys & Girls Club of
Indianapolis has made significant strides in this direction in the past four
years. Staff have internalized values of gender equity as evidenced in
their conversations and actions. Female membership has steadily
increased, and staff have become more comfortable with girls' program-
ming.

The journey to gender equity has not ended. Buildings have been
renovated, staff has been trained, programming has been adjusted, and
monies have been redistributed. However, at present adolescent girls
remain under-represented as active members. Most staff report that teen
girls generally come to the club only to watch their boyfriends play
sports. To respond, staff opened adolescent areas where the girls could
talk, developed programs specifically for the adolescent population, and
attempted to engage stragglers who arrive to watch their boyfriends.
Despite these efforts, female adolescent membership remains low.
However, the potential is there as noted by Furnham & Gunter (1989) who
found that attendance at youth clubs was the number one choice of leisure
activity for 85% of 2,000 British adolescent girls surveyed (as cited by
Swedburg & Weekes, 1994).

Supports and Barriers to Change

The administration's vision supported by quality training and a time
line for change provided a strong support for moving the organization

forward. The pacing and process by which the change was implemented provided opportunities for staff to move through initial resistance, internalize nonsexist values, and support the B&GCI Journey. Training was generally experiential in nature and provided staff with didactic information as well as work sessions for the development and creation of supportive policies. The gender equity statements are an example of staff input and ownership of the change developed through trainings.

Time has been the greatest asset to change. As might be expected from the experience in other agencies that increased resources to girls (Nava, 1984), there was initial resistance from all segments including the corporate board, women's auxiliary, staff, and youth members. For example, board members resigned, male members blocked gym entrances so girls could not enter, girls were sexually harassed by male members, and staff refused to allow girls to participate in rougher sports. As staff became more aware of the impact of gender inequity and as members learned what was expected of them, the climate in the clubs began to change. Further, as nonsexist values were embraced by the staff and actions taken to eliminate gender inequities, the behaviors and attitudes of some members also changed. Members who were most dissatisfied discontinued their membership or aged out. Younger members changed their vocabularies and their actions. Complaints of sexual harassment decreased over time.

Several barriers have slowed the momentum of the B&GCI journey. Highest on the list is fiscal restraints. Gender-equitable programming is very expensive. Some of the clubs serve as many as 215 members a day. To open and supervise meeting rooms and to provide small group activities requires a low staff to member ratio. The staff identify 1: 10 as ideal and 1: 20 as a maximum to ensure quality programming and staff-member interactions. Budgets in youth development and prevention programs are chronically underfinanced (Carnegie, 1992). In some cases this hits girls the hardest who developmentally require opportunities to interact in small groups.

One additional barrier frequently addressed by the staff is the inability to engage parents. All of the local clubs are located in economically depressed neighborhoods where parents often are not able or willing to come to the club unless it directly involves their child. The staff complain that they can teach and model gender equity in the clubs, but their impact is limited when members hear sexist comments in their homes.

Summary

In 1992 The Boys and Girls Club embarked on a multi-year journey to create nonsexist coeducational environments within their six agencies. Through a process of awareness, analysis, action, and assessment they have made significant gains. The first change phase lasted over three years and focused on staff development and training. The journey is

entering its second phase where the emphasis will shift to programming and curriculum development. The "Model for Eliminating Gender Inequity," developed two years after the journey began, serves as a useful framework for describing the process and the change. This model, originally developed for school settings, is a useful tool for eliminating sexism in all youth-serving organizations.

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