Keeping Adolescent Girls Engaged in Physical Activity

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Keeping Adolescent Girls Engaged in Physical Activity
Abstract

Research shows that adolescent girls (aged 12-15 years old) are experiencing a decline in physical activity. Research shows that adolescent girls are more likely to opt out of physical education programming when it is no longer mandated in schools (Landolfi, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to inquire how a sample of intermediate physical educators are eliciting greater participation from female students through formal and informal opportunities in physical activity.

The main research question guiding this research project is: How is a sample of intermediate physical education teachers eliciting greater participation from female students in formal and informal opportunities in physical activity? Subsidiary questions include: What do these teachers observe as outcomes from these students’ participation in physical activity? What are these teachers’ perspectives on why adolescent female students may be reluctant to participate in physical activities in school?

This research is a qualitative study where three educators were chosen to take part in a 45 min semi-structured interview. The findings from this study are that positive teacher strategies in physical education classes such as: motivation, encouragement and modeling, can help increase student engagement, and foster self-efficacy in physical activity.

Key Words

Physical Education, Physical Activity, Adolescent Female Engagement
Acknowledgments

Thank you to my friends, family, and faculty in support of this research project.
Keeping Adolescent Girls Engaged in Physical Activity

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

Physical activity is an important aspect to a healthy lifestyle, and can help adolescents feel emotionally stable, and socially connected to their peers (Casey, Harvey, Telford, Eime, Mooney, & Payne, 2014). Physical activity that starts at a young age, and the more it is implemented in the daily lifestyle, the greater chance that a healthy level of physical activity will continue as the adolescents grow into adults (Bauman, Reis, Sallis, Wells, Loos, 2012).

Physical activity can be something that is organized, such as sport, but it includes anything that requires movement of the body. This can be as basic as walking to school or taking the stairs; the total amount within a day can add up very easily. The amount of vigorous activity does not matter as much as the amount of physical activity performed (Allison & Adlaf, 1997; Allison, Adlaf, Edward, Dwyer, Lysy & Irving, 2007).

In 2011, Statistics Canada reported that approximately one third (31.5%) of our children aged 5-17 were classified as overweight or obese. Obesity is a Canadian wide problem that is ever growing. The problem with lowered physical activity levels is that studies are showing a higher rate of childhood obesity overall is rising (Riddoch, et al., 2004; Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 2003; Petracovschi, 2012). The percentage of overweight and obese children are expected to keep rising because there have been little implications for how to change the inactivity of adolescents (Statistics Canada, 2011; Riddoch, et al., 2004).

Irving et al., in 2003, found that less than two thirds of adolescents living in Ontario meet the recommendation for physical activity, and in addition 14.3% of those
surveyed did not take part in any vigorous activity during the week (Irving, et al., 2003). This dramatic decrease in physical activity, and having a higher rate of physically inactive adolescents creates problems including: higher rates of childhood obesity, and childhood diabetes (Irving, et al., 2003; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003; Petracovschi, 2012; & Riddoch, et al., 2004).

Physical activity is also used as a means to prevent chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and depression (Drabbs, 1997; & Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003). Regular to moderate physical activity has been shown to benefit physical, biological and physiological systems in the body (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997).

Research shows that adolescent girls (aged 12-15 years old) are experiencing a decline in physical activity. Research shows that adolescent girls are more likely to opt out of physical education programming when it is no longer mandated in schools (Landolfi, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011).

Girls are giving up their scheduled time of physical activity within school or organized sport because of many external factors. Examples of some of these factors include: loss of interest with physical activity, restrictions on time, competency levels that limit who can participate in sport, the social emotional growth of adolescents and peers, the influence of family values, and the issue of access to sports. (Casey, Harvey, Telford, Eime, Mooney, & Payne, 2014; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003; Slater, & Tiggemann, 2010).

Research that was looking at whether or not girls were behaving in ways that reinforced traditional gender roles, Constantinou, Manson, & Silverman (2009) noted a specific decline in physical activity amongst adolescent girls. Gender is a socially constructed pattern of behavior. The isolated Western binary that splits our genders into
only two categories creates a strong sense of social normative behaviours associated to each gender. Children are not born with a sense of how they should act, but instead learn through experience and watching others behave in what is deemed socially normal. It is typically the environment surrounding the child and their surrounding society that creates these gender norms, and specific norms can vary for genders, and their respective societal behaviours (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). For example: when you hand your daughter a pink stuffed elephant, and your boy the light up racecar, it re-enforces the normality of the behaviour associated with their specific gender.

Language can be a powerful tool in how we separate our gender norms; calling a young girl beautiful and the young boy strong as the first descriptors re-enforces how the children should perceive themselves. It is with this that the commonly known creation that young women have an idea of what they typically should have interest in, and how they should commonly behave (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). Gender socialization begins at a young age, as early as 3-5 children can associate differences between males and females. The association with different roles for gender deemed appropriate by the majority of society is what commonly forms these ideals for adolescents in middle school. (Constantinou, et al., 2009; Gorley, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003).

For some adolescent girls having to participate in a traditional physical education class is excruciatingly painful. Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003 have believed that an inclusive physical education class needs to be reinvented. They reported that “It is not sport itself that makes the experience negative and repressive, but the ridicule, exclusion and lack of feelings of contribution that often accompany these experiences” (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003, Page 443). This new classroom environment may include non-
competitive sports, and an open, safe environment for all genders to be able to express themselves. Girl participants in Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003 research described some of the reasons they do not participate in physical activity as often as the boys, and these included statements such as: “Rugby is more of a boys sport” and “Girls are more weak than boys sometimes, it means that boys can take the pain if they break their leg or something” (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003, page 437). Not all girls feel this way, but having a gender inclusive environment may create a positive effect for inclusivity for all.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to inquire how a sample of intermediate physical educators are eliciting greater participation from female students through formal and informal opportunities in physical activity. I am interested in learning about the specific strategies that educators are using to provide a safe learning environment and will foster and motivate adolescent girls to stay active (Casey, et al. 2014).

**Research Questions**

The main research question guiding this research project is: How is a sample of intermediate physical education teachers eliciting greater participation from female students in formal and informal opportunities in physical activity? Subsidiary questions include: What do these teachers observe as outcomes from these students’ participation in
physical activity? What are these teachers’ perspectives on why adolescent female students may be reluctant to participate in physical activities in school?

With these questions I will be able to learn more about specific techniques and motivation strategies promoting a healthy lifestyle with physical education for adolescent female students.

**Background of the Researcher**

My environment growing up was surrounded by physical activity. My lifestyle is attributed to a long relationship with being active, and has allowed me to enjoy positive experiences with sport and physical activity. I have seen the benefits of physical activity first-hand through my experiences, and want others to have this same experience. I see the endless rewards that physical activity can have on so many people; even without high strenuous or vigorous activity level. I am a female, and can relate to many factors seen in the literature of why adolescent girls give up physical activity. They start to have social and educational lives; they are displaying a gender role of feminine, and for the first time physical activity may not be the most exciting thing out there.

I identify as a cisgender female; I was fortunate enough to be able to have a positive experience with physical activity, and be able to play multiple sports growing up. Socio-economically, my family had the money to support me through a figure skating career, ski and snowboarding, soccer, golf, track and field etc. I was supported through a positive adolescence to be who I wanted to be, and many times received comments of my “manliness” or lack of femininity. The affect of the comments could deter women to assume more socially accepted behaviours, and begin to lower the behaviours deemed
outside of the binary gender norm of femaleness. Rather, I was so happy to be active I took the comments as a compliment because many times the comment was coupled with ability and skill in the sport. I recognize that many girls will not have the positive associations with physical activity and their identity growing through adolescence. I understand that my socio-economic ability was able to support multiple organized sports outside of school, and many children of lower socio-economic status may not be able to participate at all outside of school. This places more of an importance on schools ability to influence all women inside of the physical education classroom so that when they have the choice of being active in their everyday lives they will be more determined to try and enjoy an active lifestyle.

As a researcher it is important to evaluate self-identity in regards to the lens I will be taking while asking my research question. I understand that my previous experiences and passion for physical education drive me through the research questions with investment. I recognize I am Caucasian, and Canadian born, with a European background. I recognize that this fortunes me to many privileges that other many not have, and I carry this with me as a researcher bias. These biases tailor who I am, and my identity, but as a researcher I plan to be an open learner to better understand a classroom that is better equipped to engage all adolescent girls, and pass on the love of being active in the future.

My participation in organized sports has declined, but still able to keep a physically active lifestyle. The shift of organized sport to an individual and active lifestyle is a transition that not all adolescents and adults go through. Having the strategies as an educator to instill the love of being active will be in hopes of keeping adolescents active throughout their life cycle. I am very interested in knowing the reasons
why the girls are not staying in physical education, and more specifically the strategies and different ways that I can counter inactivity in my capacity as a teacher.

The social construction of femininity persists today in physical education classes (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). The behaviours and expected appearance of women in sport is an aspect of who should play what sport; this all depends on gender and judging peers if they deviate from typically and commonly seen social norms. Gorley, Holroyd and Kirk in 2003, said that some girls who played what was deemed a masculine sport were also seen as lesbian or unfeminine. The stereotype of masculinity with a negative connotation surrounding women and sport is becoming slightly accepted and modernized, but the problem of challenging stereotypes with negative backlash still persists for many women (Constantinou, et al., 2009; Gorley, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). The social construction of females playing specific sports and having specific characteristics of their gender identity while playing sports can still be seen in mass media, and is a barrier to some women participating to the full capacity within physical education classes (Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003; Slater, & Tiggemann, 2010; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003).

Knowing the trials and hardships that I, and many of my friends have faced growing up with sport and physical education enables me to relate and empathize with the reasons that girls are not participating within physical education. This is also the reason that I am conducting the project: I am passionate about physical activity, and movement of the human body. I would like to become an intermediate grade physical educator, and motivate adolescent girls to stay physically active and healthy in any way possible. Making physical education accessible, engaging, and safe; for all students is how I think that we can start to motivate girls to stay active, and have fun while doing it.
1.4 Overview

Research shows that adolescent girls (aged 12-15 years old) are experiencing a decline in physical activity. Research shows that adolescent girls are more likely to opt out of physical education programming when it is no longer mandated in schools (Landolfi, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to inquire how a sample of intermediate physical educators are eliciting greater participation from female students through formal and informal opportunities in physical activity.

The main research question guiding this research project is: How is a sample of intermediate physical education teachers eliciting greater participation from female students in formal and informal opportunities in physical activity? Subsidiary questions include: What do these teachers observe as outcomes from these students’ participation in physical activity? What are these teachers’ perspectives on why adolescent female students may be reluctant to participate in physical activities in school?

In this study, three semi-structured interviews are conducted with physical education teachers who share insight to their strategies that work in their classroom. In the following chapters there will be a literature review, the methodology of the research study followed by the findings and discussion from what knowledge has been acquired, and future ideas for research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction:

In this chapter, I review literature on health and physical activity in the areas of: a specific definition of what physical activity is, and how it can incorporate sport; the reasons we need to support physical education; benefits of physical activity; the importance of physical activity to adolescent girls; and how the school community influences physical activity. The review of these topics will be further subdivided to create conversations between findings, thoughts on how physical activity is important, relevant to our society, and the current studies being completed on physical activity and education.

The literature reviewed in this chapter will help clarify, and justify the purpose of this research project by providing evidence of how important physical activity is to the general public, and specifically female adolescents. The emphasis of this literature review will be on the adolescent years (12-15 years of age) in school, and how physical activity can vastly benefit both learning inside classrooms and health habits formed through middle school. Questions will be raised and as a result, the rationale for the continuation of research for keeping adolescent girls engaged in a physically active lifestyle long after middle and high school.
2.1 Physical Activity Defined

There are diverse definitions and variations of what “physical activity” is, and the definitions of “physical activity” and “exercise” are generally seen as synonymous definitions. I fundamentally define physical activity in my introduction as “body movement that can be organized”, such as sport; but that can include anything that requires movement of the body such as walking or taking the stairs (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997; Drabbs, 1997, & Nagasawa, 2013). I will continue to use this definition for physical activity, but wish to note that the particular wording of ‘anything that requires movement of the body’ because it elaborates how truly multifaceted physical activity can be.

Confusion between physical activity and exercise, is not uncommon, and are frequently used interchangeably. However, I note that physical activity does not need to be for the purpose of exercise. This creates confliction as to what physical activity is comprised of, as it can be a sport, but does not need to be sport. The question that remains is how is that different from exercise? For my research, I will be differentiating physical activity and exercise. Physical activity as movement, and an example would be co-operative games, and recreational play, or walking. I want to emphasize that physical activity can include sport and exercise, but it does not have to.

The definition I will be using for physical activity is any body movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in expenditure of energy (Drabbs, 1997, & Nagasawa, 2013). In contrast, exercise has a planned purpose of improving or maintaining physical Fitness (Drabbs, 1997). Physical activity may include sport, but it also includes light activities such as walking, or activity throughout the duration of the day.
A focus in this chapter will be on the pivotal role that physical education, specifically on educators, and educational institutions play in an adolescent’s health (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004). “Physical education” will be discussed and defined as the subject or class taken within school with the promotion and education behind health and physical activity, including sport (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004).

2.2 Research on Benefits to Physical Activity

National Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Objectives (2000) recommend 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days. Physical education is a specific course in the Ontario curriculum, and should be given adequate amount of time within the classroom. The average amount of time spent in a vigorous physical task or activity is 3 minutes, this translates to approximately 10% of the entire class (Drabbs, 1997, & Sallis, et al., 1997). We should be aiming for 50% of physical education classes to be a vigorous task, whether it is achieved through sport, team building activities or through play (Sallis, et al., 1997). Having a higher percentage of movement throughout majority of the physical education class ensures that the students are receiving the adequate amount of physical activity; especially if majority of the students are not receiving it elsewhere (Sallis, et al., 1997).

Even a moderate amount of physical activity comparable to 20-30 minutes a few times a week, can produce overall improved body circulation, increased blood flow to the brain (Allison, et al., 2007; & Sallis, et al., 1997). These health benefits in turn will help with academics and retention of information (Sallis, et al., 1997). Moderate amount of physical activity raises levels of norepinephrine and endorphins to help combat negative emotional stress, depression and anxiety (Allison, et al., 2007; & Nagasawa, 2013; & Stellino, 2008).

Along with moderate physical activity, making activity regular plays an important role in health (Allison, et al., 2007; & Drabbs, 1997). Regular physical activity means that the duration of the activity can be reduced if the frequency of the activity is increased in the period of a week. This regular physical activity will contribute to an overall more stable mental health, lowering the risk of heart disease, certain cancers, obesity, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer’s disease (Nagasawa, 2013; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003; & Stellino, 2008).

Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence has been shown to be a central role in establishing long-term positive health related behaviours (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997; Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004, Dywer, et al., 2006; Stellino, 2008). It is also important to note that regular physical activity does not always need to be vigorous or strenuous activity to see the health benefits, but rather it’s the amount in time of general physical activity that is important to be able to see the health benefits. In Physical education class we want to see movement and vigorous activity, but even moderate activity will see some benefits. (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003; & Riddoch, et al., 2004).
It is important to view another lens to physical activity, and the possible implications or risks. Physically there is a risk in taking part in physical activity, one of those being accidents. If adolescents are running or playing a game during physical education class there is always a chance for acute injury. In addition, accepting that for some students and adults, physical exercise can be hard on their bodies. Whether it is due to specific health issues that will not allow them to be vigorously active such as a heart problem, or overuse injuries such as Osgood Schlatters or shin splints as a few examples. (Drabbs, 1997).

It is important to note that “exercise programs” may have unintended psychological affects such as negative awareness of one’s body weight, and could lead to body image dissatisfaction (Nagasawa, 2013). Physical activity and education ideally should steer away from specific “exercise programs” and instead create a safe space for play and sport (Drabbs, 1997; Nagasawa, 2013; Satina, Solomon, Cothran, Loftus, & Stockin-Davidson, 1998; & Stellino, 2008).

The benefits of moderate physical activity are vast, and it can be argued that because of these benefits, either in prevention or as a prescription is a crucial aspect in growth, maturation, and development in adolescents (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997, & Drabbs, 1997; Stellino, 2008).

2.3 Research on Factors Impacting Girls Low Participation in Physical Activity

Physical activity levels have been trending in a dramatic lowering of activity, specifically as adolescents’ age, and more specifically with young adolescent girls (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997; Allison, et al., 2007; Casey, et al. 2014; Dywer, et al., 2006; Irving, et al., 2003; Riddoch, et al., 2004; & Slater, 2010). Young adolescent girls are
giving up their scheduled physical activity within school, or organized sport because of many external factors inhibiting their motivation or ability to take part in activities (Casey, et al. 2014; Dywer, et al., 2006; Riddoch, et al., 2004; & Slater, 2010).

A higher number of females were inactive compared to males, and the lowering of physical activity is found synonymously when physical education is no longer a required subject. (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997; Allison, et al., 2007; Dywer, et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003 & Riddoch, et al., 2004). Ontario students are only required to take one health and physical education credit within high school, and it has been a trend seen that young adolescent girls are choosing to not continue with physical education after the requirement has been met (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997; & Dywer, et al., 2006). The gap between inactive girls vs. boys increased throughout high school, meaning that the inactivity rate within girls increases approximately doubles from grade 9 to 12 (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003).

Girls are more likely to give up their scheduled time of physical activity, whether it is at school or organized sport because of many external factors. These external factors can include a loss of interest in physical activity, not enough time, level of competency is not high enough to continue sport, and access to sports difficult. (Dywer, et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003; Slater, & Tiggemann, 2010; Slater, & Tiggemann, 2010). The barriers that young adolescent girls face can be enormous factors to their inactivity, and research reports that body-centered issues can be another primary reason for not feeling comfortable in participating activities (Nagasawa, 2013; & Dywer, et al., 2006).
Activity level for girls increase while programs within educational school hours, seem to be beneficial. However, it did not increase the physical activity that is unscheduled and outside of school hours (Sallis, 1997; Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Physical education classes can play a role in providing some activity for young adolescents. Elementary physical education can be improved and has the potential to provide children and adolescents with a more substantial amount of time learning and being physically active (Sallis, 1997).

### 2.4 Research on Environmental Impact to Physical Activity

The school environment plays a large role in an adolescent’s lifestyle habits, girls are influenced by their social peers in regards to physical activity patterns, and their teachers’ perception of activity and its importance (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; & Dywer, et al., 2006). Schools can directly or indirectly encompass a curriculum that can both support or neglect physical activity, healthy dietary habits, and the emphasis on overall health. (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Bauman, et al., 2012, & Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004; Stellino, 2008). Stellino argues that it is what adolescents do during recess, and implementing in a more active play during recess (2008) that plays a role. Recess can help focus some adolescents on intrinsic motivation for physical activity, and to really feel the enjoyment of getting up and moving (Stellino, 2008).

The educational community can indirectly promote certain health habits without knowing the benefits or consequences (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004). Physical education classes can, and should be a crucial aspect in education because of these environmental benefits such as creating a lifestyle of physical activity, and promoting activity in the
student’s everyday life outside of physical education class (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004).

Physical education within school will not only promote activity, but can also influence a variety of healthy habits including eating. Both healthy and unhealthy habits created in middle school tend to stay constant through high school (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004). Physical activity within education offers an outlet for students maturation in social and motor development (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997, & Drabbs, 1997).

Sallis, et al., in 1997 examined the success of a physical education program named “SPARK”: Sports, Play, Active, and Recreation for Kids in the United States. Although they examined U.S. physical education for two years, they also mention Canadian programs. The study found that the 2-year program influencing physical activity in a school physical education class increased activity during class, but failed to influence girl’s activity levels outside of school (Sallis, 1997; Sallis, Prochaska, Taylor, & Hill, 1999) The study of SPARK program focused on having girls physically active while in school and after school. The two year program was a success in increasing the adolescents activity levels while the SPARK program ran, but when SPARK finished the program within the school the physical activity of the adolescent girls declined to the normal levels before the SPARK program was implemented (Sallis, 1997; Sallis, Prochaska, Taylor, & Hill, 1999).

Lifestyle habits and behaviours can be influenced by many different factors such as the physical environment at home and school, peers, self worth and acceptance, athletic competence, time constraints, enjoyment of physical activity (Allison, et al., 2007; Dywer, et al., 2006; & Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003). These factors can vastly impact ideas and behaviours throughout adolescence (Allison, et
The majority of these habits that are created by grade 6 will follow through in a trend to grade 12, both healthy and unhealthy habits (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003).

Inactivity in adolescents does not affect one socioeconomic status more than another, but the factors of why children are inactive are what differ. Bauman, et al. 2012 describe that physical activity is carried out for a variety of reasons: sleep, leisure-time, occupation, transportation, and home-based activities. The most common types of physical activity for people in a low socioeconomic status are occupational and transport; whereas, leisure-time is the most common activity type for people in a higher socioeconomic status (Bauman, et al., 2012). The surrounding environment such as home and school environments have been shown to have a strong influence on a person’s physical activity, and school environments can directly or indirectly affect health beliefs (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004).

Physical education has the capability to foster creativity and learning kinesthetically while challenging student’s educational ideals should be goals within an adolescent’s education. Having a sense of community within physical education can change the environment within a class, grade and school. This sense of community can be felt by having the same morals and goals when it comes to physical activity, and these goals can be to incorporate game and play into recess. This sense of community has been found to satisfy the psychological need for belonging and meaning (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995).
2.5 Conclusion:

In this chapter I reviewed the literature surrounding physical activity and its importance to physical education. I specifically focused on the adolescent age group as it has been found to be the most pivotal age group for creating lifestyle habits (Dwyer, et al., 2006). Research shows that adolescent girls are the gender most affected by the dramatic decrease in physical activity, and this decrease surges as they age (Dwyer, et al., 2006; & Nagasawa, 2013). The specific research area that is going to be researched in this paper is how as educational faculty members can we influence this vital age of girls to grow up to be active, healthy Canadian citizens. Various barriers of why adolescent girls are not as physically active have been heavily researched, but the next steps of how as educational institutions, and educators are creating differences within classes at the school, after school are unclear.

Questions of the level of importance physical education plays in schools, how specifically is it being taught? Whether or not the community is involved in physical activity and does that make a difference in activity levels? How are girls being specifically addressed and motivated within the physical education classes to motivate a healthy and physically active lifestyle. These questions will be addressed in the following chapter three: methodology.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is designed to explain the methods used to support my study. I begin this chapter by explaining the qualitative design for the research, and the procedures that were followed in order to create the study. I will then explain the instruments of data collection, the sampling criteria needed to ensure qualified and interested candidates, and the process of recruitment of my participants. I then will follow by explaining the data analysis used and why it is pertinent to my study, and all ethical considerations I have taken. The next subtopic will provide explanation of both the methodological limitations and strengths of the study conducted. I conclude this chapter with a summary, and rationale of key methodological decisions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

Qualitative research is a valid resource for the lived experiences and observing the daily actions of the subjects (Wengraf, 2001). This study will also involve a literature review, along with semi-structured interviews with teachers. This research study is about the lived experiences of educators teaching or involved in physical education. Conducting my research as a qualitative approach allows a quality view into the lives of the participants through their thoughts, actions and reactions to lived situations. By learning about the lived experiences, we will have a clear understanding of how these experiences have shaped the learning environment for girls in physical education class. I will be learning about how the educators have conducted their physical education class, and
specifically how they interact with the girls in the class and observations they notice about the physical activity of the school and the girls participating in the classroom.

Qualitative study is about experience, and the meaning behind those experiences add colour to our understanding of education, and in my specific region physical education (Creswell, 2001). Having the interview with the physical education teachers will shed light on the different issues going on in physical education classes told by the teachers themselves, and how they cope or strategies they use to instil the love of play, and sport into the lives of their students.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The semi-structured interview will allow conversation to flow naturally with the participant feeling comfortable adding extra knowledge or thoughts on surrounding topics (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured interview will allow for open-ended questions to be favoured, and a flow of dialogue encouraged for the participant. The flow of dialogue being more of a conversation with the key research questions still being addressed allows for some creativity and real life situations to be discussed and developed by each participant (Wengraf, 2001). Understanding that each participant will have a different background creates a unique lived experience and differences to bring to the table. The semi-structured interview is great for allowing details to immerse, and stories to be told. The anecdotes, stories and details are what add the colour and vibrancy to the lived experiences, and a reason that semi-structured interviews are the correct choice for this study.
3.3. Participants

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Here I review the specific sampling criteria I have established in order for a participant to take part in my study. The sampling criteria is established in order to ensure that the correct type of participants are involved, and are able to offer competent information and life skills needed to answer the questions being asked. I have included a section where each participant will be introduced, along with a short bio to include who they are, and the experiences they bring to the table.

The sampling criteria used to select the educators to take part in my study are as follows:

*Participants will have experience teaching physical education to girls in grades 8-10 OR experience coaching girls sports.* It is important that the educator whom is being interviewed have knowledge of teaching intermediate level girls in physical education. The rationale behind this is that it is important that participants be able to speak to their observations and instructional strategies regarding girls’ participation in physical education. Girls in grade 8 are still immersed in mixed-gender classrooms for physical education, so this will ensure that participants can speak to their observations of girls attitudes toward physical education relative to their male peers. Physical education courses in grades 9 is the first year where the genders are spilt, and the last year of mandatory physical education. The grade 10 physical education, on the other hand, is not mandatory and it would therefore be beneficial to hear teacher perspectives on female enrolment and engagement at these levels. If the educator is a coach to intermediate girls, involved in supervising girls in a sport, or physical activity
in a school setting the rationale behind this is that they are aware of the perceptions and notions that girls have while playing sports. Keeping in mind that their demographic will be different because all of the girls they will be coming in contact with are girls who already want to be part of a sport, and negating a large portion of girls who will not be playing sports.

*Participants will have a demonstrated commitment to physical education, and to supporting girls’ participation in sports and physical education.* The participant must be passionate and have a drive to teach excellence within the classroom and on the field. The rationale behind this is the educators with a demonstrated commitment to this area will be able to speak to their experience actively encouraging and sustaining female participation in physical activity, and their observations concerning key factors and effective teaching strategies.

### 3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

Keeping in mind that the nature of my study is small and with the resources given I will rely on convenience and purposeful sampling. I have immersed myself in a community of physical education by volunteering with Pan Am Games, and TDSB for track and field experience. By networking and explaining the purpose of my thesis, I will provide participants criteria and ask that these individuals/organizations distribute my information to qualified and interested teachers they believe may fulfill the criteria. By providing my information it will allow interested teachers to join my study, with no pressure or obligation to take part.
I am immersed in both the physical education community as well as educators throughout Toronto and South Western Ontario, and will rely on the connections made to help promote the study to both interested and adequately qualified educators.

In order to find my participants I will be using my networking of colleagues and educators already known. I will be contacting physical education specialists who are instructing at OISE and reach out to the Ontario Association for the Support of Physical and Heath Educators. I will present my information out to them and encourage them to pass along to peers whom fit the criteria. I specifically know one excellent and passionate gym teacher from Thames Valley District School Board where I may start investigating who would be interested in participating in my study.

In addition, I will create a pamphlet that will describe what my study is, the purpose and how you can become a participant and pass it to the educators already known to me that have others that they know will meet the criteria. Using the network of educators I have to pass along knowledge, ideas and people who they know will fit the criteria is convenience sampling, but with the size of the research project it is a great option for finding some real lived experiences of educators in my area.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

This section will be devoted for the participants selected for an interview for the study. They will each have their own bio to show the differences and similarities to the participants, as well as offering a small window into their life events and experiences.
they bring to the study. The participant Bios are in no particular order, and shall be presented in the order I interviewed them. Note that all of the participants’ personal information that would give away their identity will be shared; pseudonyms have been chosen to protect anonymity. All of the educators work in the public sector within the province of Ontario, Canada.

Annabelle is both an educator and coach with 12 years of experience. Educating in a public high school in Ontario, Annabelle has been coaching since 2003, and started her teaching career two years afterwards in 2005. Annabelle has had the opportunity to teach both co-ed, and female only physical education classes and sports. Annabelle coaches both field hockey and rugby at the high school she teaches. Annabelle has taught physical education through her career, and is currently teaching grade nine French and English.

Annabelle’s passion for physical education and activity steams from her childhood experiences. She had family support that drove her to want to become competitive, and she expressed she enjoyed challenging herself in new ways. As a teacher Annabelle wants to be the catalyst for her students to form an interest and passion in their own way.

The second participant interviewed was Natalie, a grade seven teacher in a public middle school. Natalie has taught for 12 years as a teacher, and this is her second year teaching physical education. She is the core teacher of a grade seven class, and physical education is part of her course load. In previous years she has helped with the growth and development units but not the activity based classes. Natalie teaches females in a mixed
Natalie describes her affinity for physical education as recent, and is excited to continue learning. She describes of always having a healthy lifestyle, but more recently in the past five years choosing to pick up more sports and fitness activities.

Natalie’s passion for her students is to have a positive body image, and self-efficacy when it comes to being active. She wants her females to believe in themselves, and their abilities while being active. Her focus is to get each student up, moving, and sweating in every lesson. An issue that she wants to tackle in her classroom is body image, and making sure her students have a strong sense of self. Media has pressured so many young women into having negative self body image that Natalie puts emphasis on making sure her students examine mass media, the images that are being put out, and ways to combat the negative feelings. She feels that the classroom is a perfect platform for students to share feelings in a safe space, and by middle school they are ready to talk about body image, and their feelings about their self-esteem.

The third participant interviewed was Evan, a grade eight teacher in a public middle school. He has taught for over ten years in a variety of subjects including a core teacher, shop, and physical education. Currently he is a core grade eight teacher, and two classes of physical education. Evan’s passion for physical education stems from being a coach for a long time, and he loves seeing the personal gains and improvement in his students and athletes.
Evan teaches his students in a co-ed gender environment, and he described that he would only want to teach his students in a co-ed context because of the real world value. He described that he wants his students to develop in a classroom where both genders are present because it creates positive relationships and mutual understanding of their peers. Evan describes this as a difficult task because students are finding their selves in middle school, but that it has the most benefit to real world connotation.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this section I am explaining the significance of data analysis and its relevance to my research question. I will be describing, relating and comparing the data from the interviews. I will be creating themes throughout the findings, and they will be representative of what I have found, and not found (null) with the interviews. I will be allowing the data to drive the themes created instead of looking for pre-determined themes within the interviews. The rationale behind letting the data drive the description, relation and comparison instead of creating themes is because when themes are created, the ideas that were shred from the interviews can be formed and squished into the created themes, and allowing for less of an idea of what the participants said and more about the researcher and what themes they wanted to find (Bazeley, 2009).

By using the data received and delving deep into what the meaning behind the interviews were and the real lived experiences, I will not just be creating themes and allotting experiences that fit those theme. Instead, I will be describing the how and what, relating what was said and comparing the data to get a deeper, richer experience (Bazeley, 2009). Allowing similarities and variances between participant answers, and
themes within one participant, and throughout the participants without the former
creation of themes allows the participants answers to form on their own.

Qualitative data can generate access to the lived experiences that are not as easily
accessible in other research, and gives us a richer understanding of what is truly
happening with the participants (Bazeley, 2009). We can learn more from the participants
than if there were to be themes and experiences slot into those themes. I will let the data
drive me, and I will be writing to the voices and the methods backed up by research.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In this section I will be reviewing the ethical procedures taken throughout the
duration of the study. Even though I had sampling criteria that the educators must reach, I
gave out my information to all parties that were recommended to me to ensure the
possible participants only contacted me if they were interested. This deters obligation
from the educators and that I am finding willing and qualified participants. Participants
are given a consent letter (Appendix A) allowing audio recording of a semi-structured
interview. The consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical
implications, and specifies expectations of participation (One 45-60 minute semi-
structured interview).

I will also note that during any time throughout the study if any of the participants
change their mind about participating or including their answers in my study they could
have that choice at any point during the study or interview. They will be assured that they
can withdraw their participation at any point in the research process. There are no known risks to this study. I will share the transcript with participants so they can review their responses. If any of the responses they had given did not coincide with that they wish to have said, or they wish to null their answers I gave them the opportunity before I analyze the data.

All of the participants involved are given a bio to get to know their experiences more, however, their identity will be strictly confidential and all participants will be given a pseudonym to protect their identity. All information that directly co-insides to their identity or the school identity they are working in will be not included. All data, including the recording will be stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed completely after five years.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

In this section I will be stating the multiple limitations and strengths of the study. I will first acknowledge the limitations to the study, following by the strengths.

A limitation of this study is the sampling criteria, it eliminates a lot of educators, but it also allows for a more precise type of educator; with that being said because I am looking for a specific type of educator I am aware that their experiences may be different but the general sampling population is homogenous as physical education teachers. Only being able to interview teachers limits the knowledge and represents the experience of the students without interviews in their own experience.
Having a small sample size of interviews means that the findings cannot be generalized, and will not be representative of either physical education teachers, or intermediate girls. Having a homogenous population can create similarities or trends that may not be a real trend or topic. I also acknowledge that the educators that participate in my study may be due to convenience sampling and using the networking of educators I have met during my immersion into the education field. Using a single research method, in this case interviews limits the amount of variation in knowledge found through observation and other methods.

In addition, the specific view of this research is directly looking at female gender and physical activity. The topic was chosen specifically because of researcher passion and shown by literature the need of this research. Only focusing on one gender isolates the needs of females, when future research with more time could focus on both genders. The Western binary of male vs. female is not inclusive for people who do not subscribe to a specific gender, or expression is different than the gender prescribed at birth. This research is to start a larger conversation of students needs to be successful at having an active lifestyle. Hopefully future research projects will be able to focus on the needs of all students.

Strengths to my research study is the qualitative design. I find that this study using qualitative approach recognizes that researcher bias is inherit to all research, and accepting that I as a researcher bring a lens and a bias is important to consider and acknowledge before releasing the data analysis and explanation of what the study means (Merriam, 2009). Another strength to the research study is the type of interview style;
using semi-structured interviews allows a flow of conversation with participants able to add anecdotes, and elaboration on selected questions to be encouraged.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has given a summary of the qualitative research approach and procedures used to create a successful qualitative study. I explained the instruments of data collection and the sampling criteria needed for participants to partake in the study. I went through the sampling procedures and how I found my participants along with a section introducing the participants taking place in my study an a personal bio about them to get to understand and welcome their ideas in chapters to come. I then covered how data analysis is important to qualitative study, and specifically how I used it for my qualitative interviews. I reviewed the ethical limitations and variations used to accommodate the participants of the study and to ensure a safe learning and sharing environment. I finally acknowledged the limitations and strengths the methodology used in the study, and how it could affect the research findings.

In the chapter following, I will report my research findings from the semi-structured interviews. The methods stated in this chapter will be used throughout the interview process, and into the research findings.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will report the findings from the three educators interviews. To restate, the main research question that was asked is: How is a sample of intermediate physical education teachers eliciting greater participation from female students in formal and informal opportunities in physical activity? Subsidiary questions that were asked included: What do these teachers observe as outcomes from these students’ participation in physical activity? What are these teachers’ perspectives on why adolescent female students may be reluctant to participate in physical activities in school?

My participants Annabelle, Natalie and Evan were able to answer the research questions and offer life experiences. The literature review will support the findings from the interviews, and help raise new questions. The chapter will reference Annabelle, Natalie and Evan throughout the findings and their full participant bios are referenced in chapter three. Annabelle is a high school coach and has taught physical education before; both Natalie and Evan teach in a middle school context where they teach their core classroom physical education.

This chapter will be represented in two large themes, each with their own sub-themes. The major themes are: ‘Positive Teacher Behaviour with Physical Activity’, and ‘Barriers Female Students Face with Physical Activity’. Positive teacher behaviour with physical activity has three sub-themes. These sub-themes are as follows. Passion, Encouragement, Modeling. Barriers students’ face with physical activity has four sub-themes: insecurity, gender issues, curriculum, and society.
4.1 Positive Teacher Behaviour with Physical Activity

Positive teacher behaviour was one of the main areas of my research questions. I had asked all of my participants what their strategies they used within their classroom to elicit a positive response from girls participation in their classroom. This theme corresponds with the thesis purpose of how as educators can we illicit a positive relationship with physical activity to ensure our adolescent girls continue to have physically active and healthy lifestyles. Knowing these strategies will be able to help new teachers who want to keep their students physically active, or educators questioning the lowering levels of physical activity among girls. I wanted to know the possible educational strategies that they use to instill a love of physical activity that could hopefully extend past the mandatory stages of physical education. Essentially, what are the actions that teachers are taking to keep our adolescent girls physically active during physical education class; and once class has commenced, staying physically active as a lifestyle. The school environment plays a large role in an adolescent’s lifestyle habits, girls are influenced by their social peers in regards to physical activity patterns, and their teachers’ perception of activity and its importance (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; & Dywer, et al., 2006).

Analysis from participant interviews demonstrates that they created a unique community within the classroom, and using positive strategies can have a positive outcome on the adolescent in physical education (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson & Schaps, 1995). The behaviours were different and unique to each teacher with three strong sub themes that each teacher exhibited in their own unique way. The subthemes to positive teacher behaviour with physical activity are: Passion, encouragement, and modeling.
4.1.1 Passion

The first sub theme is passion. Each of the participants had a specific passion for physical activity, and education. Annabelle had grown up in an active household, and had a valued movement and physical activity from early childhood. My literature review supports the idea that Physical activity that starts at a young age, and the more it is implemented in the daily lifestyle, the greater chance that it will continue as the adolescents grow into adults (Bauman, Reis, Sallis, Wells, Loos, 2012). She thought that the passion for being active was instilled at a young age, and she likes to get her students as active as she can through competitive and non-competitive sport. The key to staying active for Annabelle is to continuously try new things. To challenge herself in ways that she has not faced before. Mastering a sport is very hard, and by continuing to expect more from yourself, you also expect that in your students. Her passion for sports and being active is also her educational purpose.

Natalie had always been physically fit, but not as active as she would have liked. Recently Natalie started working out and progressively making it a lifestyle habit. This lifestyle habit is now a passion; she wants her students to be able to experience as many activities possible, in hopes to inspire and engage all of her students. Teaching her own grade seven gym is enjoyable to her, and she can bring in her own life experience to the physical education classroom. Natalie has a plan to instill her new passion for physical activity in her students by allowing choice and a voice in her classroom. She wants the students to be up and moving in any way possible, and does not want to hinder ideas that may lead to physical education success.

Evan has been a coach for a long time, and has a passion for teaching sports. The coaching aspect is almost an innate trait in physical education teaching. Having this
passionate background in sports can be seen to have a positive effect in his classroom. Evan wants all of his students to better themselves, and not to worry about the rest of the class. Having a non-competitive approach to aspects of physical education has the power to encourage and engage all students in their own capacity. The students can see that he is excited to teach, and with the experience behind him it is evident that the teaching style is well respected by the students.

4.1.2 Encouragement

Encouragement is seen as a teaching strategy that has a positive effect on the students’ perceived likeliness of physical education. In research encouragement is seen as an environmental factor of the physical education classroom, and plays a massive role in the development of the adolescents (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004). Each of the participants felt that students needed positive reinforcement throughout the year to encourage benefits of physical education and activity. All three participants used encouragement, but the interesting aspect is how and when the encouragement is used. Encouraging students, and having a positive reinforcement with students helps to create a sense of community has been found to satisfy the psychological need for belonging and meaning (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Each participant was unique in the delivery, and the reasoning why and when encouragement should be used.

Annabelle felt that girls needed more encouragement than the boys did to receive the same or similar results. The specific type of encouragement is important for Annabelle; she can turn a mistake into encouragement by pointing out what they are already doing great, and adding the correction. It can give them the drive to challenge themselves while knowing that they have the correct skills to accomplish the new goal
placed in front of them. The most important goal in Annabelle’s encouragement is to find meaning in the encouragement. “There’s 25 girls out there and you really try your best to try to find something, and I know there is practices like, every, at practice, I try to pull a girl to the side and say ‘You’re important to this team because’…. I try to pick out something specific”

Natalie felt that she wanted to treat boys and girls equally, but also realized that when she gave encouragement to girls it was well received. Her plan was to move into encouraging all of her students, and making sure that her girls and boys were equally interested in the activities in her class. Encouragement came in the form of whoever needed encouragement that day was given the praise. It did not depend on gender, but instead on need. “It is important to give a variety of skills they won’t get at home”. She did this by giving them options. Allowing the students to choose the topics of study was important to her.

Evan made sure that the encouragement came at an individual basis, and creating an environment where you only want to be competitive with yourself earns rewards when you have beat your previous score, or time. The encouragement is needed to continue a positive experience. Evan gave an example of the 12-minute run that had to be performed per curriculum guidelines. One student at the beginning was not able to run for more than one minute without stopping. Encouragement to not try to beat anyone else’s goals but her own got her to run 12 whole minutes without stopping. High fives and rewards were given by beating her personal record. The encouragement in Evan’s class is personal and non competitive. Having non-competitive activities in physical education has been shown to increase efficacy in students who are unsure about their abilities or do not feel comfortable playing traditional sports. Instead we can teach games with the transferable
skills that relate to the game, so when it comes time to play the competitive game in a lesson the students who previously had a lower self-efficacy may find that they have the skills to be able to compete in the class (Mandigo, Butler, & Hopper, 2007).

4.1.3 Modeling

Modeling was shown through my participants as a very important teaching technique used to convey students what is expected, but also to know that the teachers can be active as well. Having an active teacher in the classroom shows the students how it can be done, and how important it is not just for the grade level, but also for the entirety of their life to be active. Modeling can show a proper technique, how to run a drill, or it can simply just to be on the same playing field as your students enjoying yourself.

Annabelle used modeling every physical education class and while coaching. She would never put her students through a series of workouts if she herself could not do them herself. Many times she would dress and try to beat the students. Evan also agreed with doing the activities with the student to give them a role model. This gives the students someone to look up to, and physically see the instructor performing the tasks beside them or in front of them gives them confidence, or competition to try to beat.

Natalie changes every gym class so her students can see her get sweaty, and in pain. She wants the students to know that at every age its important to be moving and trying your hardest. “There is nothing wrong with it, there’s a beauty in it”. Her aim is to get all of her students moving and sweating in her physical education classroom. Literature supports her statement because it has been found that students in physical education classes were not moving moderately or vigorously for majority of the class
(Sallis, et al., 1997). Natalie is trying to combat this by having her students up and moving in every single class, for the majority of the class.

4.2 Barriers Female Students Face with Physical Activity

To properly be prepared to keep students engaged in the activities that are happening in physical education classes, participants were well aware of the barriers that their students faced from staying physically active. The four sub categories for this theme are: insecurity, gender issues, curriculum issues, and society. This theme was so persistence because the participants could see the lack of effort and lack of interest from their female students. Young adolescent girls are giving up their scheduled physical activity within school, or organized sport because of many external factors inhibiting their motivation or ability to take part in activities (Casey, et al. 2014; Dywer, et al., 2006; Riddoch, et al., 2004; & Slater, 2010;). The participants agreed that the female students showed less interest, tried to give excuses to not participate or would not give their fullest efforts while participating. The sub themes for barriers students face with physical activity are: Insecurity, Gender Issues, Curriculum Issues, and Societal Issues.

4.2.1 Student Insecurity

Insecurity was shown in the interviews to be such a massive part in why students are not interested in performing while in physical education classes. “It is not sport itself that makes the experience negative and repressive, but the ridicule, exclusion and lack of feelings of contribution that often accompany these experiences” (Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003). The literature also shows that many times it’s not the physical activity, but
its putting oneself into a situation where there may be mistakes made and outside many students’ comfort zones.

Annabelle felt that her students she sees in high school have deeply rooted values and self efficacy in regards to Physical activity. Annabelle described that once the students minds are set, its hard to change their attitudes if they feel they are incompetent. Annabelle shared that its extremely difficult for her to turn someone into loving physical activity who hates it in high school, she does her best to change their minds be engaging and occasionally it can happen where they shift their mindset.

Natalie and Evan both feel like the middle school years are the most important in regards to the self-esteem with physical education. Literature supports the self-growth in middle school, and the importance of supporting a healthy active lifestyle. Research shows that the habits that are made in regards to physical activity, both good and bad stay with students as they grow into high school; the stronger the habits the harder they are to break in the future (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003).

Natalie found that her female students were using various excuses to stay out of being physically active, and many of the complaints were about their menstrual cycles. Natalie emphasized that in her class she promotes physical activity throughout the menstrual cycle to decrease the amount of negative symptoms associated. Having her female students know more about their bodies and the changes associated with their age may help them make healthy choices in regards to physical activity.

Evan found that the adolescent changes in his students made them self-conscious and less willing to challenge them selves as they used to in younger grades.
4.2.2 Social Gender Roles

This thesis was focused on the female gender, and learning strategies that teachers use to influence females into becoming more physically active. Although gender is the major theme of this paper, the subscribed gender roles that females fall under can become a barrier for them to become physically active. In this section we will specifically be looking at what the literature and my participants thought about the gender differences in their classrooms, and norms that girls face in all aspects of life.

The association with different roles for gender deemed appropriate by the majority of society is what commonly forms these ideals for adolescents in middle school. (Constantinou, et al., 2009; Gorley, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). The ideals of how to act invade the self-esteem, and self-confidence of students and the ability to keep a high percentage of students interested in physical activity diminishes. Annabelle finds that her students have already decided concretely how they are going to be participating in her class. Even her students that continue to choose physical education have a hard time performing to the best of their ability, an idea why this could be happening is hard to maintain the social identity without being labeled. Girls now choose how they want to be seen, and usually physical activity is not one of those labels wanted (Constantinou, Manson, & Silverman, 2009 & Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003).

Evan identified that the change from child to adolescent is hard, and the gender issue for him only comes into play in middle school. This could be a huge moment for change, but it is not easy to change the minds of adolescents when their idea of importance may be the social network around them. When girls stay physically active, and are going against the social norms and what is accepted of them, social consequences
with family and peers, it is going against what is “wanted” and deemed “acceptable” (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003).

4.2.3 Issues Teachers had Within Their Physical Education Classrooms

A higher number of females were inactive compared to males, and the lowering of physical activity is found synonymously when physical education is no longer a required subject. (Allison, & Adlaf, 1997; Allison, et al., 2007; Dywer, et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003 & Riddoch, et al., 2004). I did not include any curriculum research questions for my interviews, but it was shown in my literature review that the lack of mandatory physical education could play a role into the lowering percentage of active female adolescents. This sub-theme will primarily be from spoken word from the participants in their feelings and actions with the curriculum documents and their students. Each participant spoke to the curriculum guidelines and how the students could be hindered from the fact that it is usually performance based.

Annabelle wished that within the curriculum there were more opportunity for intramurals, non-competitive sports and giving more of an option while the students are in high school. An idea that she had was to separate physical education like we have academic and applied; but rather it would be a hobby or recreational physical education and a more sports oriented stream. She admitted that it would segregate students, but it could be a viable option to keep some of the students who get lost in the wave of competitive sport.

Natalie and Evan both in elementary school felt that the importance of physical education should be increased, with more scheduled classes. Both teachers like having mixed gender classrooms; Evan put it clearly that it “emulates the most real-life scenario.
There will always be mixed genders in the real world, why would we separate them?”. The social and motor development that happens in dual sex classrooms creates a challenging environment, but a real life environment.

4.2.4 Societal Issues

Societal issues like technology, and socioeconomic status are massive barriers to students staying physically active. Specifically technology is keeping students indoor and plugged into devices rather than exploring. The effect of technology was not looked at in my literature review, but upon the interviews it seems that from a teacher stand point that technology is a very big issue.

Annabelle does not wish to have technology in the physical education classroom. She recognizes the time and place for technology, but wants to instill the natural exploration and learning that comes from being active.

Natalie has a ‘fitbit’ and enjoys the challenge of staying active each day. The ‘fitbit’ keeps her accountable, and a great tool to motivate. The issue that Natalie faces with her students is the socioeconomic status of her students has a negative effect on their activity levels. The idea of ‘play’ is not a reality when most kids are in apartments, the parents would have to be with them or not be able to keep an eye on them if they allow them to go out with friends. Evan agrees and states that many parents encourage the academic rather than physical education and would rather their students become academically successful. The school plays a large portion of the percentage that the child is active, and without physical education class the child may have zero to little daily physical activity.
In my literature review Bauman, et al. 2012 stated that there was insignificant difference between the activity levels of different socioeconomic statuses; but what does change are the reasons that they are active. Lower socioeconomic status has to have a purpose for the activity, whereas a higher socioeconomic status is more of a leisure activity. This could be an interesting area of research, and I could have added more into my literature review of what I could anticipate with different socioeconomic areas. This was not a major implication when I first started my thesis, but I now see based on the teachers recollections that it could be a major difference between adolescents; whether it plays into young adolescent girls from participating in physical education that is a different thesis in itself.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the main themes that were brought up in all three interviews. The themes that were examined were ‘Positive Teacher Behaviour with Physical Activity’, and ‘Barriers Students Face with Physical Activity’. These themes are connected to the research questions I have asked, and give a voice to the interview participants.

Each participant has a unique style, and the similarities are strong in important areas like the strategies used in their classrooms. A main finding from all three participants that align with research is the classroom environment. Having a classroom where it is safe to try and take chances opens up the opportunity for more females to participate, and could increase the self-efficacy of the females. A higher self-efficacy could increase the number of females who are engaging in physical activity on a regular
basis, with hopes of it continuing through their lifespan. (Drabbs, 1997; Nagasawa, 2013; Satina, Solomon, Cothran, Loftus, & Stockin-Davidson, 1998; & Stellino, 2008).

The variations between participants were their teaching styles, and the importance placed on different parts of the curriculum, and how they structure their classroom. The important aspect is that all three teachers clearly have a passion for physical education and are doing their best for every student to have a positive experience in their class.

The next and final chapter will be taking these themes and discussing them in a broader concept of important takeaways, things I have learned, and also questions I will be asking for the next steps to take after this study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction/ Overview

Physical inactivity is recognized in Canada as a major public health concern; it is associated with the leading causes of death, illness, and disability, such as coronary heart disease, colon cancer, breast cancer, stroke, respiratory disease, and diabetes (Allison, et al. 2007, Stats). The research question guiding the study is: how does sample of intermediate physical education teachers elicit greater participation from female students in formal and informal opportunities for physical activity?

The purpose of this research study is to explore strategies educators use to instill an enjoyment for movement and physical activity. Learning these strategies could potentially improve an educator’s ability to increase the amount of female adolescents participating in physical education and active lifestyles. This study was not to make all female students interested in competitive sports, but rather to have the strategies as an educator to be able to motivate future students more holistically and share a love of being physically active as a healthy lifestyle in all aspects of adolescent growth.

For the duration of my study, I have chosen my definition of physical activity as body movement that can be organized, such as sport; but that can include anything that requires movement of the body such as walking or taking the stairs. Using the term ‘anything that requires movement of the body’ depicts how truly universal physical activity is, I want to make sure that when we as educators are promoting physically active lifestyles we are aware of the boundless opportunities for young adolescent girls to be active.
The focus of addressing adolescent female students stems from the prevalence of drastic inactivity rates. Literature supports the notion of females dropping out from physical activity drastically more frequent compared to their male classmates. (Constantinou, Manson, & Silverman; 2009; Landolfi, 2013).

“Establishing patterns of physical activity during childhood and adolescence is important for immediate gains in health and well being, and to develop positive behaviours that can be deployed throughout the life course” (Dwyer, et al. 2006). Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence has been shown to be a central role in establishing long-term positive health related behaviours (Allison & Adlaf, 1997; Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004; Dywer, et al., 2006; Stellino, 2008). Physical activity has been shown to be widely beneficial in multiple growth areas of an adolescence that leads to a healthy adulthood. The social, emotional, psychological and physical benefits can be astonishing with moderate daily physical activity (Bauer, Yang & Austin, 2004; Dywer, et al.2006; Riddoch, et al., 2004; Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 2003; Petracovschi, 2012).

In this research study, three Ontario educators were interviewed, in hopes of learning both middle school and high school perspectives on physical education. I introduced my participants in Chapter Three, whose pseudonyms are: Evan, Natalie and Annabelle. Two of these educators are female, and one male. Two of the educators are located in a middle school setting, while the third was in a high school setting. The three educators answered my research questions for approximately 45 minutes in order to help me find specific techniques and motivations that they are using to promote physical education for their adolescent female students.

In the remainder of this chapter I intend to state the findings I concur from my research study, then state the implications both broad and narrow for these findings. I will
then have recommendations for the educational community, specifically to physical educators, and newly educated teachers. I will finally focus on future areas of studies before concluding my Masters Thesis Project.

5.1: Overview: Key Findings and Significance

The findings are in response to the main research question of how a sample of intermediate physical education teachers elicit greater participation from female students in formal and informal opportunities for physical activity. I have illustrated two main themes presented in chapter four, each with subthemes. The two main themes presented in chapter four are as follows: Positive Teacher Behaviour with Physical Activity’, and ‘Barriers Females Students Face with Physical Activity’.

From the above main themes, I have aligned three main findings of my research. I will state the three findings, and in subsequent paragraphs expand on each of these findings. The three main findings from my research are:

1) A positive and safe community within a classroom benefits the self-efficacy of female adolescents, generating stronger participation and enjoyment within physical education.

2) Encouragement and modeling are noted as participants’ two strongest teaching strategies in regards to motivation used in classrooms to form self-efficacy in physical education classrooms.

3) Choice and student voice in physical education class, coupled with positive feedback and assessment has potential to elicit a greater female participation.
From these three findings, I shall now expand in detail in the order they were presented. Participants stated that a positive and safe community is needed for their female adolescences to feel like they can try and succeed, but also to try and fail in order to learn. The community of learners extends from the regular classroom scenery and into the gymnasium where all students’ have different abilities, challenges and opinions on the activity at hand. Having a safe place to inquire, learn and question about the movements is important for learning and creating self-efficacy.

The participants believed that their female students form a major portion their of identity and self-efficacy in middle school. This shows that there is potential to influence female students’ attitude about physical education in middle school. The adolescent years are a crucial component to the relationship between self-identity and physical education. The findings from this study has shown that the more positive memories and events in physical education as an adolescence, could lead to a higher possibility of an interest in physical activity inside and outside the classroom (Dywer, et al., 2006).

The strategies most often used by educators are creating a safe classroom environment, encouragement, and modeling the specific activity for the students. Overall, the more detailed and specific the motivation was, the more impact it had on a student. Annabelle stated clearly how she uses motivation by stating to her students and athletes something specific about them. She has used examples such as “‘You’re important to this team because’…. I try to pick out something specific”. Having a specific piece of assessment and feedback has the potential to increase self-efficacy in physical activity. Increasing self-efficacy within physical education with positive teacher actions will increase overall participation in female students, and increase in an active lifestyle.
Modeling the activity, movement, or motion implies that you are able to do the activity, that you are giving effort and ability towards the activity, and that you care about the activity. Students having the role model be the teacher allows a visual and the direct body language statement of “I care about physical education” therefore you should to. Natalie expressed always making sure that she was dressed for the physical education classes so that she was prepared to jump in for activities, lead warm ups and genuinely try her best to be involved in the classroom activities.

Offering choice in the type of physical activity, coupled with positive feedback and assessment in physical education class has potential to elicit a greater female participation. Evan noticed that when he started to assess his female students not against a rubric, but against their own created goals and achievement charts that he saw a motivation for improvement. Before Evan cited that the female students would look and think, I can’t do that. Evan then changed the requirements of the class expectations. Instead of racing against a time for a grade, they raced against themselves creates a self-efficacy battle, instead of the requirements. The mentality shifts to “I can beat my last score”. Eliminating the competition helps to change the motivation to a more internal and holistic approach for the individual student. Evan has seen major improvements in the participation and enjoyment of female students in physical education class since his changes to the class requirements.

The main findings of this research study are practical teacher strategies that can be implemented in the daily physical education class without major interruptions to the classroom they currently have set up. The main findings contain creating a safe environment for female students so they feel like they have a safe space to try and learn. Use encouragement, and modeling as positive strategies for female self-efficacy. Finally
allowing students to have a voice in the physical education classroom where they have a choice in the activities at hand. In the next section I will discuss the implications of the findings in regards to both broad and narrow implications.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Broad

The broad implications for this study can be significant for a variety of educators such as: Physical Education teachers, newly graduated teachers, and professional development. If our rate of adolescent inactivity continues as seen in literature; the potential implications could be drastic on our upcoming generations health (Allison & Adlaf, 1997.; Neumark-Sztainer, et al.; 2003; Petracovschi, 2012.; Statistics Canada, 2011.; Riddoch, et al., 2004).

Knowing this in-depth information about how atrocious inactivity to our health, it becomes vital to our health to solve this issue. The implications of these strategies and themes found in my study such as the strategies teachers use could be straightforward and manageable actions that have the potential for a large benefit to the students’ attitudes towards physical activity. These strategies are easily applicable, and hopefully the success seen in the future will be a positive shift in the activity levels of adolescent female students.

Continuous education for physical education teachers is important for keeping our educators and classrooms relevant and engaging. Implications of my study on physical education teachers can help influence adolescent female students to experiment with different types of physical activity and giving them a voice and opinion. The implications
of creating a safe community in the physical education classroom allows for social, emotional and physical growth to happen in an environment with no judgment or fear to try. These safe spaces are pivotal to help generate a positive mindset about physical activity, and increase students’ self-efficacy.

Having authentic strategies from physical education teachers that are impactful is insightful for future physical education teachers. Knowing the applicable and meaningful strategies that can be implemented on an every day basis will help teachers create an engaging and active classroom. These strategies can impact more than just the physical education teachers. The implications of having a positive physical education class could then influence the department, or school. The impacts of having a positive relationship with physical activity are endless. If the school adopts a healthy and active lifestyle the impact could be endless. An active school could influence the board, province, etcetera. Being educated about the everyday actions and strategies in physical education classes are manageable, applicable, and the benefits are largely positive and continuous in the level of impact.

Implications at a professional development level could mean that we use these strategies to educate newly trained teachers positive pedagogical strategies. Educating teachers in these applicable strategies could have a positive impact on the new generation of students. As educators, taking professional development is important to remain relevant and to be able to keep your pedagogical methods engaging. The strategies in my findings can be easily taught in a professional development course because the focus is on creating a safe community environment, and motivating our female adolescents to enjoy their physical activity and education. Professional development is about continuous learning, and implementing the new strategies learned. In doing so, the impact on
students may benefit their relationship in physical activity, in hopes of creating a lasting impression and healthy lifestyles. I truly believe that these strategies are applicable for every physical education class, and the meaningful choices that teachers’ make can have a substantial impact on a student’s life.

5.2.2 Narrow

As a teacher candidate with a background in kinesiology and a positive experience with physical education from adolescence to adulthood, I have always wanted to lead a physically active lifestyle. I can see the positive impact and benefits from physical activity, and would like my students to be healthy in all aspects of their life: socially, emotionally, psychologically and physically.

Students’ health and well-being is one of the standing pillars of my philosophy of education. In my own practice, I strive for an active classroom, and implement activity daily. I believe the implications of my study is important for my personal growth, and strategies that I implement in the classroom. Even if I am unable to keep female students enrolled in physical education after grade nine, I want to positively impact them. I hope their education leading up to grade nine was positive, and they feel like they have the motivation and capability to continue being active in their lifestyle habits. The personal implications of my findings has allowed me to create a deeper understanding of what strategies like encouragement, modeling and offering choices mean for the students, and the impact I can have on students experience. I can manageably implement my strategies learned, and potentially create a positive experience for majority of my female students in my physical education classroom. My philosophy of education is to positively influence
the lifestyle of my future female students in a holistic manner, and the findings of this study compliment my teaching principles.

5.3 Recommendations:

The recommendations from this study is to start making the small and manageable changes in your teaching strategies that make you confident in the type of classroom you are co-creating with students. Educating your practice, staying engaged in the physical activity can allow you to be a positive role model for students. Recommendations of actions that could have a positive impact include: making observational notes about your students, and creating specific motivational feedback on how they are doing in physical education. This practice is applied in literacy, and based on my findings could have potential to create a positive effect on the students efficacy in physical education class.

Another recommendation from this study that can be applied at the classroom level is the teachers approach to physical education. This can be the manner in which a teacher approaches the classroom and can indirectly affect the students. A positive approach to physical education could mean a wardrobe choice associated with the task at hand. Having clothing that allows movement, includes the teacher in the classroom environment, and increases the opportunities for teacher involvement. Having functional clothing can create an opportunity to positively impact the classroom environment. Natalie eloquently shared her thoughts about her activity in the classroom when she stated “…they see me getting sweaty & in pain; there’s nothing wrong with it, there is beauty in it”. Having the students being able to look up at you engaged in the activity at hand has potential for them to also see the value in the activity at hand.
Further recommendations include the type of instruction and activity within the classroom. A positive change within the classroom could simply be changing the type of sport played, or altering the rules. Having choice within the instruction of sports, and introducing new activities that can include the wide range of abilities in a classroom. This now offers a new perspective of what physical activity is, and the type of sport that needs to be taught in school. Changing the types of activity has the ability to reach female adolescents that otherwise would not have been engaged in the traditional instruction. For this study I chose a broad definition for physical activity; if you remember it is “anything that requires movement of the body”. I chose this purposefully, because I believe all movement is positive, and anything that is enjoyable for the female students has a higher likelihood to positively impact these students. A recommendation for new sports and activities to include in class includes: co-operative games, a student lead workout, and variations of already known sports, or new and exciting games without direct competition. It is not expected that physical education teachers know everything active and all co-operative games to influence students. I believe education is being apart of the journey with your classroom. A growth mindset and continuously learning attitude is exactly what the students need to see in order to value physical education themselves.

In addition, it could be important to offer options and a voice in the physical education classroom. This gives them a voice in the classroom and investment in their education. Creating a classroom where students are valued and have their needs met, can impact their outlook on physical education. You never know whom you may inspire with a mindfulness yoga class, or a co-operative game.
5.4 Areas of Further Research

Physical activity is a widely researched topic of how beneficial it is for adolescents, and the barriers that adolescents face to become active. Taking what I have found in my research project further with more detail and research about the social construction of gender, and how it affects the perception of physical education would be very interesting. I feel that the construction of gender was an underlying barrier to the female students enjoyment in physical education, and I would have loved to follow that avenue to learn more about the construction of gender and its impact on physical education.

I would have enjoyed researching the topic of all genders and strategies teachers use in their classrooms to promote physical activity, because all genders are seen in literature to be widely inactive. The research could be conducted to see what kinds of physical activity high schools could adapt to bring a more wide range of skill levels to physical education. A new lens of research could also look at how to engage physically active adults, in hopes that a physically active family will foster a love of being physically active.

Learning more about the effects of physical activity and the rate at which it benefits other subjects in high school may offer lens of keeping physical activity mandatory, or to increase number of physically active students throughout high school knowing that they are also benefiting their other courses.

5.5 Concluding Comments

Physical activity is beneficial for adolescent females to positively grow socially, emotionally, psychologically and physically. My research can be of importance to
physical education teachers, newly educated teachers and professional development
teams who could possibly focus on strategies to create a safe community within the
physical education classroom. How we create our communities is important, and being
able to have these strategies in our back pocket could be valuable as a new teacher such
as myself.

The inactivity of female adolescents is unsatisfactory, and by learning strategies
for teachers can employ with the hopes of positively impacting the female students in the
classroom is genuine. Having strong physical education teachers can make the subject
more interesting to a majority of students, possibly creating a more active community of
learners in all aspects of their life.

Physical education is invaluable, irreplaceable and a subject that is a part of our
everyday lives and health. The subject never leaves us, even when we have left the
classroom environment. Physical education becomes out physical lifestyle, and directly
impacts students in all aspects of their life. Having adolescents being physically literate
could instill a positive and active lifestyle. I would love to see an emphasis on physical
literacy, and what that looks like in schools. We now know how important physical
activity is for us, how can we now act in a way to value and embody this new idea. Using
this research project as a launch pad and inspiration for future research in physical
education, and looking into the benefits from having physical literate students could be
positive for our future generation of learners in 2016.
REFERENCES


ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY


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Appendix A: Consent Form

Date:

Dear ________________________________,

My Name is Allison Sinclair, and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on girls perceived notions of physical education, and how to enhance the experience of physical education for intermediate girls. I am interested in interviewing teachers who are involved in physical education, activity or involvement with intermediate girls. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will
not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Angela MacDonald, and you are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Allison Sinclair

Allison.sinclair@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Angela MacDonald

Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Allison Sinclair, and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Section A: Background

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. What grades and subjects have you been able to teach before?
3. What is the title of your current role?
4. How have you become involved in physical education?
5. To what extent are you able to promote the inclusion of women in your classroom?
6. How did you become interested in including women in physical education and activity?

Section B: What and How: Physical Activity

7. Describe how physical education is a passion for you
8. What does it mean to “physically active” to you?
9. What does it mean to be active outside of school, to live an “active lifestyle”?
10. Do you believe that your students inside and outside of your classroom fit your description of being physically active?
11. Do you believe there to be any benefits to being physically active?
12. Q12: explain how you feel about physical activity and the impact it plays on the students lifestyle?
13. How would you explain the significance of girls participation in physical activity outside of class? (including sport, play, leisure time)
Section C: Physical Education Class

14. How would you describe the motivation in your physical education class?

15. Could you identify the positives to physical education in your opinion?

16. Explore the idea of 100% participation in your physical education class, what would that look like?

17. Describe how you believe your class to be involved in an active lifestyle

Section D: Changes, Strategies and Tactics

18. Do you believe that there has been a change in activity level throughout your experience as an educator?

19. Do you believe that there has been a change in activity level throughout your experience as an educator?

20. How do you view your role as an educator to influence change?

21. How do you believe your role as an educator (either positive or negative) can influence the health of the students in the school?

22. Describe some tactics and strategies that you believe to influence a positive response in girls to physical activity

23. Are there any tactics you believe that can positively affect the perspective of females becoming active in your physical education class?

24. Are there any tactics you believe that can negatively affect the perspective of females becoming active in your physical education class
25. If you had to describe the perspective of the female participation, how would you describe it?

26. What do you believe the next steps are to adequately involve intermediate girls in physical activity that will increase enjoyment and participation?