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Female Students' Apathy Toward Secondary Physical Education  
(Under the direction of ROSE CHEPYATOR-THOMSON)

The purpose of the study was to investigate female students' perceptions of their physical education experiences that led to their disinterest in secondary physical education. The extent to which apathy by female students was imposed by the educational institution and individual was examined. The theoretical framework of critical social inquiry informed the study. Specifically, feminist poststructuralism was used to deconstruct patriarchy within educational practices. The variables studied included female students' perceptions of social interactions within physical education, the curriculum and the physical setting. Qualitative sources of data collection consisted of observations, open-ended questionnaire and school documents. Constant comparison and triangulation were utilized in data analysis. Themes that emerged from the data analysis related to: teacher, curriculum, school environment and female students' self-perceptions. Critical feminist analysis of the themes revealed female students' apathy to be related to hierarchical stratification within secondary physical education.

INDEX WORDS: Physical Education, Apathy, Feminism, Deconstruction,  
Patriarchy, Qualitative Study, Stratification

FEMALE STUDENTS' APATHY TOWARD  
SECONDARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

by

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## DEDICATION

In memory of my brother, Steve Ray Davol, who taught me to live in the sunshine  
and enjoy each day as if it was your last.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The United States society is stratified based on hierarchical social positions. The prominent means of stratification are along class, race, and gender lines (Sage, 1998). Social class may be defined as a construct of socioeconomic standing, race may be understood as a construct of biological essential characteristics, and gender refers to imposed social behaviors based on the sex of a person (Gabbard, 2000). Class, race, and gender as elements of stratification are reproduced in social institutions. Hence, issues of class, race and gender that impact society at large, also influence school institutions.

Class divisions are replicated within the school systems in the United States society. The upper and upper-middle social classes control resources that directly affect curriculum content and student learning. For instance, stratified educational outcomes among students are partially produced through the system of public school funding. According to deMarrais & LeCompte (1995), most of the public school systems in the United States rely on property taxes for 40 to 45 percent of their financial support. Savage Inequalities, by Jonathan Kozol, documents the structural inequalities in financing schools. Kozol (1991) stated, "the property tax is the decisive force in shaping inequality" (p. 54). Property tax revenue for lower economic locations is profoundly less than upper and upper-middle class districts. Though the state provides funding to the poorer communities to compensate for disparity, it only provides for a "foundational" level (Kozol, 1991, p.208). The established level provides for minimal, rather than equal

funding. Less funding lends to fewer instructional resources, directly affecting student learning. The process of funding public education essentially institutionalizes class inequalities within school systems.

Race, another element of stratification, is replicated within the United States school systems. Gabbard (2000) suggested monolithic practices in education reproduce societal racial privileges by the dominant monolingual and monocultural group. Eurocentric white discourses are presented as legitimate knowledge, subtly teaching students that other cultural discourses are inferior. Sleeter (1991) stated that language policies in the United States schools "have been established largely on the basis of maintaining Anglo-Saxon political and cultural dominance" (p. 215). African American Language is discounted as an incorrect form of communication, while bilingual education programs are being phased out of school institutions (Sleeter, 1991). This monolingualism paradigm is attached to curriculum, teaching and evaluation patterns. In addition, minority students are disproportionately tracked into vocational programs, limiting opportunities for advancement in society (Oakes, 1986). Racial stratified practices within schools have led to disparate learning for nonwhite racial groups.

Studies in education have revealed gender stratification within schools, as well. Research suggests that teachers provide more positive and corrective feedback to male students (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). School instructional materials have disproportionately or completely excluded social contributions by females (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). The exclusion of female lived experiences within the curriculum has a debilitating effect on female students' school experience. In addition, school administrative positions are predominately held by males, who control educational policy decisions (deMarrais &

LeCompte, 1995). School practices, such as these, place a higher value on male discourses. Inequitable opportunities for females in school correspond to gender divisions within society.

Equity involves challenging the power structures that control the distribution of knowledge. Equity in schools necessitates systematic changes with the school institution. Educational equity means providing students with more than equal learning opportunities. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) stated that "'equity' implies that students' educational performance and outcomes will be the same across groups of students, it does not imply that students need the same things to *achieve* those outcomes" (1999, p. 4). Patterns of class, racial, and gender stratification within schools prevent equitable educational opportunities.

Educational institutions are responsible for preparing students to become members of the larger society. Ideological discourses that present American schools as sites of equal opportunities lack a critical perspective of educational realities. Class, race, and gender relations constitute sources of interacting inequalities (Gabbard, 2000). Hegemonic and ideological discourses in society are reflected through inequitable learning opportunities in schools. Hegemony may be understood to mean control of social relations and social institutions by a dominant group in society, and ideology refers to a set of ideas within society that explain and legitimize current social conditions (Sage, 1998). Dominant ideologies are disseminated through the schools' reproduction of stratified social relations within society. The resulting disempowerment, "serves to marginalize and silence students who, by virtue of their race, gender, sexuality, or social class, do not recognize their lives in school narratives" (Gabbard, 2000, p. 108).

Gender stratified practices have been commonplace in the school physical education environment. As Evans (1993) stated, "in the gym, the prevailing white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, high-skilled, ideology of elite performance in sports appears daily in physical education" (p. 30). Physical education has traditionally stratified students by gender and ability levels (Evans, 1993). Jewett, Bain, and Ennis (1995) claim, "low-skilled students may not receive the most innovative curriculum and may be unmotivated when placed in the low ability group" (p. 113). Consequences of differentiated educational practices leave the lower level student, typically identified in physical education within the female student population, with inequitable learning experiences.

The construction of gender within physical education has been found to reproduce patriarchal discourses. Previous research suggests that female students' interest in physical education continually declines with years (Stewart, Green, & Huelskamp, 1991). Fourteen percent of adolescent females are reported to be physically inactive, compared to seven percent of adolescent males ("Adolescent," 1999). Research that examines gender stratified practices as a culprit for female apathy in physical education is lacking. Pedagogical attempts to increase female students' interest in physical education at the secondary level need to address male hegemonic practices within physical education and female students' voices concerning their physical education experiences.

In this study, a critical social perspective was used to examine female students' apathy toward physical education in a secondary school. Critical social theory deconstructs the gradational social divisions. The theory attempts to debunk hegemonic

and ideological discourses that serve to maintain the current social structure (Bennett & LeCompte, 1995). Reproduction of stratification within social institutions can be examined through a critical social inquiry. Educational institutions are seen as a mechanism to further the established social order by reproducing the dominant discourses in society. Interactions between the student, school establishment and society contribute to students' overall schooling experience

### Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was first, to examine female students' perception of physical education, and second, to provide suggestions for curriculum and teaching practices in secondary physical education. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which female students' apathy may both be imposed by the institution and the individual. Hence, the intent of the study was to deconstruct female students' perspectives on their physical education experiences that led to their disinterest in physical education. The research questions used in this study are as follows:

1. To what extent are gender socializing agents influential factors in female students' apathy toward physical education?
2. To what extent has the teacher and curricular practices affected female students' interest in physical education?
3. To what extent does female students' attitudes toward physical education affect student behavior within the subject?

### Significance of Study

The significance of the research study lies in the examination of female students' constructed realities toward physical education at the secondary level. The study

examined realities imposed by the student, teacher, and curriculum. Second, literature on student interest in physical education lacks exploration of female students' voices. This study connects previous research in student attitudinal responses toward physical education with an emic perspective of female students' lived experiences in physical education. Third, research findings have suggested a drastic decline in female students' engagement in physical activity at the secondary level. Research by Sallis (1993) indicated that females' physical activity engagement decreases by 7.4% per year. The study suggests reasons why female students' involvement in secondary physical education is minimal. Pedagogical strategies to increase female students' activity level in secondary physical education are discussed.

The theoretical framework of critical social inquiry informed the study. Critical inquiry challenges hegemonic interests that serve to further the production of power relations (Crotty, 1998). Grundy (1987) identified hegemony, consciousness and ideology as "factors which have an important bearing on what goes on in institutionalized learning" (p. 172). The ideology of patriarchy has traditionally dominated educational practices. Vertinsky (1992) stated, "observations of physical education programs suggest that the values of male-oriented team sports and an emphasis on the competitive ethos are still deeply ingrained in the school tradition and in the psyche of those who implement curriculum" (p. 386). In this study, critical social theory was used to deconstruct the ideological constraints placed on female students in the physical education environment and connect them to the wider society

Physical education is not immune from the influence of sociocultural constructed realities. Social realities are imposed on female students through the patriarchal system

of power. As Crotty (1998) stated, critical inquiry entails a "critical reflection on social reality in readiness to take action for change" (p. 159). The development of a critical consciousness empowers students to challenge the existing social order (Humberstone, 1995). A critical social perspective promotes consciousness raising that allows for social activism in gender equity.

### Subjectivities Statement

The personal positionalities I carried into the research process may have influenced my understandings of females' physical education perceptions. Positioning myself with a critical social view, I sought to transform the structure of schooling within the physical education environment. The decision to examine female student apathy toward physical education through a critical lens supports my intentions to promote social change. My agenda was to reform the current social system that oppresses females through the promotion of gender differentiation.

As a physical educator, I must critically examine the subjectivities I possess concerning the value of physical education. Personal assumptions of the benefits physical activity has on persons may have limited my understanding of student apathetic attitudes toward physical education. Female students who lack parental support and/or physically active role models may not perceive physical education as personally advantageous. Peer groups for adolescent females may discourage involvement in physical activity, producing negative attitudes toward physical education. When interpreting female student responses, I had to continually reevaluate my subjectivities toward empowering females through physical education.

Confrontation of my white, middle-class privileges was an ongoing process throughout the research. Non-white high school females' perceptions of physical education may differ from my white experiences. Students from upper or lower socioeconomic classes may have varied social realities impacting their interest in physical education. In addition, female students with comparable lived experiences may have limited my critical reflection through "shared similarities" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 31). Acknowledging these possible differences and similarities enabled me to present a more accurate representation of female students' perceptions of physical education at the secondary level.

Systematically searching for personal subjectivities within my research was a conscious action. Attending to my partialities moved beyond mere identification of their presence. As a researcher, I had to examine the intersections of my positionalities within the research. According to Peshkin (1988), "untamed subjectivity mutes the emic voice." In this study, I intended to explore the social realities of females at the secondary level through their voiced perceptions, rather than my personal assumptions. Providing a representative emic perspective required me to continually revisit the influential impact that my personal subjectivities had on the research study.



## Definition of Terms

Critical theory: A theory that reveals assumptions of power relationships that govern society and seeks to encourage participants toward emancipation (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995).

Deconstruction: The process of unmasking contradictions and assumptions within texts (Rosenaw, 1992).

Discourse: Written and spoken texts that invite dialogue (Rosenaw, 1992).

Equity: The recognition of diverse needs among particular groups to reach similar outcomes (AAUW, 1992).

Hegemony: The control of social relations, social institutions, and cultural practices by a dominant group in society (Sage, 1998).

Ideology: System of ideas that explain and justify social conditions (Sage, 1998).

Patriarchy: The legitimization of male power within the social system (Sage, 1998).

Stratification: A hierarchical arrangement of persons into varied social groups (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender is constituted within the hierarchical structure of power that privileges males in the society of the United States. The established power relations between males and females are sustained through socially constructed realities of appropriate gender identities. As Radtke and Stam (1994) stated, "that which is considered to be female and male reflects the subordinate - dominate relation of female and male, and when we 'do' our gender appropriately, we act to maintain that relationship" (p. 9). Differentiated gender relations are further reinforced by cultural practices and social institutions. Research related to gender stratification within society and educational institutions has significantly increased in recent years. Researchers have primarily focused on disparate opportunities between males and females, without analyzing how gender stratified experiences are perceived by female students.

The review of literature for this study examines the construction of gender within schools. Of particular interest is the oppression of female voices through their lived experiences. In this research investigation, the practice of gender was critically examined in relation to female students' interest in physical education. The purpose of the study was to deconstruct the perceptions of female students' toward secondary physical education in relation to their apathetic attitudes towards the subject. The first part of the literature review has focused on the theoretical perspective of critical social theory within education. Secondly, stratified practices within the educational system and physical

education were discussed. Thirdly, students' perceptions of secondary physical education were reviewed. Finally, pedagogical implications for secondary physical education are provided.

### Critical Social Perspectives in Education

Critical inquiry in schooling challenges the production and reproduction of socially contrived meanings. A critical theorist views school as "an oppressive institution" (Hlebowitsh, 1990, p. 10). Albeit, within a socially critical framework educational institutions can be a medium for emancipation from inequitable school practices. As deMarrais & LeCompte (1995) stated, "if those involved in the schooling process are able to resist the oppressive practices of schooling, and if critical consciousness can be developed by teachers, administrators, and students, schools can become sites of social change rather than of social reproduction" (p. 30). A critical social perspective of gender equity within physical education can lead to educational, as well as social reform.

Critical social theory from feminist perspectives focalizes male ideological power as a culprit that produces inequitable social relations. Scraton (1990) identified the feminist theories of liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and socialist feminism. Liberal feminism makes the assumption that if females are provided with equal opportunities, then present gender inequities will be eliminated (Bain, 1985). Liberal feminism fails to critically deconstruct the patriarchal structure in society. Radical feminism moves beyond providing equal opportunities and works toward female autonomy from patriarchal control. Radical feminists, "rather than attempting to transform patriarchy, argue for women's separation from men" (deMarrais & LeCompte,

1995, p. 284). Class relations dominate the context of Marxist feminism, with capitalist values being the root of gender divisions (Scranton, 1990). Socialist feminist scholars consider the interrelationships between capitalism and patriarchy, and their aggregated manifestations on gender relations (Scranton, 1990). However, Marxist and social feminist scholars do not deconstruct gender meanings the way they are constructed within society. According to Wright (1995), a feminist poststructuralist paradigm critically examines how gender meanings are produced and reproduced in society. deMarrais and LeCompte (1995) stated, "feminist poststructuralist examine the ways competing language patterns produce our notions of gender" through constant engagement in constructing and deconstructing our understanding of meanings in language (p. 285).

Feminist theories ascribe to various perceptions of gender equity strategies in education. Liberal feminist seek to provide equal opportunities for females to engage and enroll in courses dominated by male students. Radical feminist scholars assert that gender segregated classes offer a more equitable learning environment for female students. Marxist and social feminist scholars challenge the existing patriarchy in education by "calling for the total transformation in the structures, policies, and practices" of schools (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995, p. 285). Poststructural feminist scholars examine the production and reproduction of patriarchy in educational practices and attempts to deconstruct gendered language. To critically examine the social system in American educational institutions, a poststructuralist perspective was used.

Poststructuralist feminism postulates institutional reconstruction within the school system to disseminate patriarchal power relations. Scranton (1990) explained, "unless

ideologies of femininity and masculinity (incorporating physical power relations, sexuality, and the sexual divisions of labour) are challenged and altered in and through physical education, then the subject will continue to produce and reproduces gender divisions and inequalities" (p. 12). Gender discourses in physical education that reproduce binary social oppositions between males and females need to be critically deconstructed. Through the deconstruction of female positionalities in physical education, emancipatory actions may be undertaken. The theoretical perspective of poststructuralism allows for social transformative changes to be examined (Wright, 1995).

#### Gender Stratification within Educational Institutions

Educational institutions serve to reproduce dominant male discourses. According to deMarrais and LeCompte (1995), "schooling is the learning that takes place in formal institutions whose specific function is the socialization of specific groups within society" (p. 2). Socialization is defined as "the process of learning the rules of the social group or culture to which we belong or hope to belong and of learning how to define ourselves and others within that setting" (Kramer, 1991, p.73). Gender socialization in schools instructs students to accept rigid gender role standards. Stevens, Jr, and Wood (1992) stated that "socialization gradually becomes stereotyping as girls and boys are taught to exclude 'inappropriate' expressions from their behaviors and to include only those identified with their sex" (p. 75-76). Defined gender roles have been maintained through our educational institutions, leaving female students educationally disadvantaged (AAUW, 1999).

Schooling has reproduced the gender divisions portrayed in society. Gender stratified instructional practices are demonstrated through the school curriculum. Curriculum refers to "the total school experience provided to the student, whether planned or unplanned by educators" (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995, p. 194-195). The school curriculum has been seen to be a prominent regulator of students' learning experiences (Walker & Barton, 1983). Further, student learning that occurs beyond the scope of the official curriculum can have significant educational implications. The hidden curriculum within schooling conveys implicit sociocultural values to students through what is included and omitted in the curriculum (Bain, 1985). Fernandez-Balboa (1993) stated that through the hidden curriculum students are socialized "into accepting particular modes of thinking and acting that support and legitimize power structures and social inequalities" (p. 248). Gender discourses in the curriculum are illustrated through the course content, teacher-student interactions, and student course selections.

Content knowledge transmitted to males and females through the education curriculum is tainted with gender biases. Instructional materials that marginalize females by reinforcing gender stereotypes have traditionally dominated school texts (AAUW, 1992). In addition to stereotypic representations of females, exclusion of females in the school curriculum has been prominent. In 1992, a research study was conducted on the content of 15 math, language arts, and history textbooks that were utilized in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The findings of Sadker and Sadker (1994) revealed:

The 1989 language arts textbooks from Macmillan and DC Heath had twice as many boys and men as girls and women. In some reader the ratio was three to

one. A 1989 upper-elementary history textbook had four times as many males pictured as females. In the 1992 DC Heath Exploring Our World, Past and Present, a text for sixth graders, only eleven female names were mentioned, and not a single American adult woman was included. In the entire 631 pages of a textbook covering the history of the world, only seven pages related to women, either as famous individuals or as a general group. Two of the seven pages were about Samantha Smith, the fifth-grade Maine student who traveled to the Soviet Union on a peace mission (p. 72).

Curriculum silences women's accomplishments and contributions in the educational process and perpetuates the notion of male dominance. deMarrais and LeCompte (1995) stated, "what is left out of the text, sends a clear message to students about what is important and what is peripheral knowledge" (p, 265). Content left out of the curricula is considered to be part of the hidden, or null curriculum. Napper-Owen, Kovar, Ermler, and Mehrhof (1999) referred to the null curriculum as "the program that is not taught" (p. 3). Excluding women in the educational process may lead to the phenomenon where females perceive themselves in the role of a silent supporter, rather than a verbal, active leader. Behaviors displayed by female students in school reflect this perception of subordination. The inevitable outcome carries its effects beyond the academic environment.

Teacher-student interaction patterns lend to varied school experiences by female and male students. In a research study observing over 100 classrooms, it was found that "boys are more likely to be praised, corrected, helped, and criticized - all reactions that foster student achievement" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p.55). Regardless of the

instructor's sex, teachers call on boys two to twelve times more often than girls in any class (Mann, 1994). The differentiation of teacher-student interaction can reinforce behaviors considered gender appropriate. Male students may develop aggressive behaviors to gain the teacher's attention, while female students may become passive as their voices are silenced (Silverman & Ennis, 1996). These behaviors maintain the dichotomy of power between genders.

Teachers' expectations can further differentiate learning experiences for females and males. Research on teachers' expectations found that teachers assume male students are more intelligent in subjects of math and science (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Similar findings in physical education relate to the assumption of male superiority in physical performances (Wright, 1995). Sorensen and Hallinan (1987) suggested that gender expectations affect student placement in high ability groups, with male students that have comparable math aptitude abilities as female students being placed in the higher level groups. Lower expectations for females may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Females that are socialized to believe they are incapable of being successful in a subject may avoid advancing their skills and knowledge in the subject area. This reactive behavior only magnifies the gender gap in academic performance.

Gender stratification also occurs when students are encouraged to enroll in 'gender appropriate' courses (Roberts, 1980). Encouragement placed on males to select math and science-related courses and on females to select language courses increases gender differences in education (Grossman & Grossman, 1994). Course selection patterns studied by AAUW (1992) revealed that female high school students were less likely to enroll in advanced math and science classes, yet outnumbered male students in



language courses. Math and science are provided a hierarchical status over language courses in our social context, thus maintaining the patriarchal power system in society.

Research related to gender practices in schools has provided insightful information regarding gender inequities. Female students are not achieving the same educational outcomes as male students (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Despite findings of gender discrepancies, the research literature has primarily focused on comparisons between female and male students. Research related to how female students have constructed their oppressed reality is needed.

Examination of male domination within our educational institutions requires gender constructs to be deconstructed. Hollinger (1994) stated, "deconstruction tries to show that what is privileged, what is present, depends on the absent other that it seeks to dominate and erase" (p. 110). Resituating the educational experiences of the female through transformative actions, removes the restricted otherness placed on females. Transformation of the female consciousness necessitates a critical examination of the lived experiences of female students.

#### Discourses in Physical Education

Physical education tends to rank significantly lower in academic importance as determined by the school environment. Siedentop (1987) declared that he viewed "high school physical education as an endangered species, a subject matter that might gradually become extinct in secondary curricula in America" (p.24). Reasons provided for the potential elimination of physical education at the secondary level included ineffective instruction and a lack of physical education program expectations (Siedentop, 1987). Taylor and Chiogioji (1987) stated that the loss of physical education's credibility was

due to the differentiation between physical education goals and practices. The lack of a meaningful physical education experience relates to its lower academic status.

The marginalization of secondary physical education within our educational institutions is evident through the state mandated physical education requirement. The Georgia Department of Education requires students in high school to complete one semester of physical education during the entire ninth through twelfth grade school period ("Georgia's Quality," 2001). College preparation requirements in high school have increased, limiting the amount of time available for courses considered to be nonacademic. Evans (1993) explained this occurrence by stating it is "a fundamentals movement in US education which translates to increased concentration on the 'academic subjects' of reading, writing, math, science and social studies to the exclusion of 'peripheral' subjects such as art, music, and physical education" (p. 30). In addition, lack of funding is often cited as a causal determinant of the physical education requirement.

Despite the instability of physical education at the secondary level, previous research has implied that the majority of high school students consider physical education to be an important part of the school curriculum. Research conducted by Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1993) found that 57% of students perceived physical education to be important. Though the study reported a majority of students valued physical education, caution must be taken when 43% of the students reported physical education to be of little importance to their overall educational experience. In an attitudinal survey conducted by Rice (1998), only 51% of the participants agreed that physical education was of equal importance compared to their other school subjects. Contrary to this finding, Stewart, Green, & Huelskamp (1991) reported that 82% of secondary students in

grades seven through twelve stated that physical education should be included in the school curriculum. However, only 64% believed physical education should be a required course for every grade level (Stewart, et al, 1991). A discrepancy seems to exist between the importance of physical education inclusion in the school curriculum cited by students and their belief toward physical education being a requirement. Students may be cognizant of the value of physical education without it affecting any behavioral changes to actively participate in physical activities.

Physical education goals may fail to correspond to positive student attitudes toward physical education. According to Stewart, Green, & Huelskamp (1991), seventy-four percent of high school students perceived physical fitness to be the primary purpose of physical education. Forced participation in fitness exercises were reported to cause negative experiences toward physical education in 74% of students aged 11-19 years (Tannehill and Zakrajsek, 1993). Negative perspectives of fitness activities by secondary students contradict the physical education program valued outcome of health-related fitness benefits.

Particular interest has been focused on student enjoyment in physical education at the secondary level. Rice (1998) reported that 85% of high school students surveyed found enjoyment in their physical education experience. This data seems less profound when compared with the findings of Godin and Shephard (1986) that revealed students perception that exercise is fun declined from grade seven to nine. The research results may be an indication of physical education programs that fail to implement fitness exercises that relate to student interests. It could be inferred that physical education is providing activities students enjoy but have insignificant fitness outcomes. Nonetheless,

providing students with enjoyable, health beneficial physical education should be a desired goal.

Research findings that suggest a decrease in student interest in physical education correlates with a decline in physical activity involvement in high school students. A National survey of adolescents stated that only one half of adolescent males and one quarter of adolescent females engage in the recommended 20 minutes of vigorous exercise three or more times a week (Pate, Long, & Heath, 1994). Sallis (1993) noted a 2.7% decrease in physical activity engagement of males per year and a 7.4% decrease with females per year. These results suggest that female high school students are at a higher risk of adopting a sedentary lifestyle.

The number of high school students opting to select an elective physical education course parallels the decline in adolescence's physical fitness levels. Females exhibit a more drastic decline in elective physical education enrollment. Luke and Sinclair (1991) reported 67.8% of female students at the secondary level did not elect physical education, compared to 48.5% of the male students. Attitudinal research conducted by Stewart et al (1991) illustrated a consistent decline in female students enrollment in physical education from grades seven to twelve, with only 32.2% of females inclined to take physical education. The relevancy of physical education has not been conveyed effectively enough to produce behavioral changes in high school students, especially female students.

### Gender Stratification in Physical Education

Equity within physical education at the secondary level has been a problematic issue. Emphasis on biological sex differentiation as it characterizes physical power has

implied male superiority in the physical education environment (Scruton, 1990).

Physical fitness testing standards have higher expectations for males than females. This assumption fails to recognize physical differences within each gender. An analysis of gender bias fitness testing of students between the ages of 10 and 13 participating in the Physical Best fitness program revealed no significant performance differences between male and female students aged 10 through 12 (Wilkinson, Williamson, & Rozdilsky, 1996). Discrepant standards and lower performance expectations for females only increases gender stratification in physical education. Thomas and Thomas (1988) stated:

Many parents, teachers, coaches, and peers continue to behave as if girls should not exercise and participate in sport to the same degree and level that boys should. This attitude and expectation results in the self-fulfilling prophecy: Girls participate, perform, practice, compete, and behave exactly as society expects. The result is reduced levels of physical activity and practice, in turn resulting in lower levels of health-related physical fitness and sport skills (p. 227).

Gender standards in physical education programs that polarize male and female physical bodies through these practices have contributed to the oppression of female movement. In addition, less pronounced achievement standards expressed in physical education affect student learning and participation. Evans stated (1993), “while boys are judged by ‘achievement’ with regard to masculinity, girls are judged ‘against’ masculinity” (p. 145). The gender standards derived minimize the physical potential female students can achieve.

The physicality of females has been marginalized in physical education by the reproduction of gender stereotypes in society. In "The emBody-ment of power: gender

and physical activity," Gilroy (1989) suggested that physical power is a valued and empowering attribute for males, but not for females. Gilroy (1989) stated that "physical prowess is valued for women when displayed in the form of woman as beauty object, and although this form of prowess may empower them, it does so in the form of a double-edged sword, i.e. they are promoting their own oppression" (p. 163). The centralization of physical appearance with female involvement in physical activities is manifested in physical education through gender restricted movement patterns.

The objectification of the female body within society has maintained the patriarchal power structure. With the physical body being central to physical education goals, perceptions of female involvement are regulated by a focus on physical appearance that reflects the ideal feminine body. Students unconsciously accept their gender role and strive to conform to societal expectations. A study conducted by Godin and Shephard (1986) reported that male students beliefs toward exercise and its associated consequences differed from females. Male participants valued "being tired" and "having fun" as positive exercise resultants, whereas female students believed exercise intentions to be an effort to "look better" (Godin & Shephard, 1986, p. 46). The overconcern with physical appearance was found in a study by Rice (1988), when the tendency of females to view themselves as overweight was reported. Scraton (1992) stated that "for women the primary objective in relation to the 'physical' is to look good for others and, most significantly, for men" (p. 100). The physical body of females becomes an object of male gratification, rather than a mechanism of physical empowerment.

Physical education practices that differentiate activities into categorically male and female activities perpetuate the notion of male physical superiority. Since World War II physical education has relied on sports and traditional games for its activity content (Wright, 1995). With sport being a male domain in society, females are automatically placed in an inferior performance position. This inferiority is often viewed as a natural phenomenon. Wright (1995) stated:

Boys' preferences for rough and tumble games like football and their apparent desire to display daring over the vaulting box are taken for granted as natural.

Girls' preferences for, and superior performances in, dance and expressive activities and their apparent reticence to participate in physical education is again attributed to their natural passivity and lack of aggressiveness and competitive spirit (p. 12).

Traditional activities offered in physical education favor attributes socially defined to be male-oriented. Presumptions of masculine and feminine preferences toward certain activities assist in the maintenance of gender stratified learning experiences.

Student course selections in secondary physical education reflect socially contrived gender boundaries (Griffin, 1985). Griffin (1983) found that boys choose flag football and girls choose gymnastics. Chepyator-Thomson and Ennis (1997) stated, "boys tended to avoid the aerobics class and girls tended to avoid weight training" (p.92). Ninety-two percent of students enrolled in aerobics were females, while sixty-two percent of students in weight training were males (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis, 1997). Course selection patterns that reproduce gender lines within schools are conceptualized within society (Napper-Owen et al, 1999).

### Student Perceptions of Secondary Physical Education

Studies investigating student attitudes toward physical education have increased in the past several years (Ennis, Cothran, Davidson, Loftus, Owens, Swanson, & Hopsicker, 1997; Figley, 1985; Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Stewart, Green & Huelskamp, 1991; Tannehitt & Zakrajsek, 1993). The increase in research related to student attitude in physical education may be attributed to the proposed correlation between student attitudes and student behaviors (Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). Figley (1985) suggested that students with positive attitudes toward physical education are more likely to engage in physical activities. Students with a negative perception of physical education have been found to avoid physical activity (Carlson, 1995). Thus, student attitude in physical education may influence her/his future behavioral responses to physical activities.

Attitudinal studies in physical education have utilized various measurement methods. Data sources have included both quantitative and qualitative measures of attitude perceptions. The primary quantitative means of data collection have been attitudinal scales and surveys (Lumpkin & Avery, 1986; Rice, 1998; Stewart, Green, & Huelskamp, 1991; Strand & Scantling, 1994; Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1993). Qualitative research conducted by Luke & Sinclair (1991) and Figley (1985) relied on the critical incident report, an open-ended instrument, to study students' attitudes towards physical education. Qualitative methodology consisting of observations and interviews have been used to a lesser extent, though these means have provided insightful information regarding the attitudes of students toward physical education (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis, 1997; Ennis et al, 1997).



Determinants of attitudes toward physical education have been revealed through attitudinal research surveys conducted on secondary high school students. The prominent determinants for positive and negative attitudes of physical education have centered on teacher practices and curriculum activities (Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Figley, 1985). Teaching practices have also been examined to determine teacher-student interaction patterns, student grouping and teacher discourse (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis, 1997; Griffin, 1985).

Research results have identified several contextual variables related to the development of positive attitudes toward physical education. A physical education curriculum that includes a variety of activities has been related to positive student attitudes (Rice, 1998; Strand & Scantling, 1994). Luke & Sinclair (1991) reported the highest positive support for curriculum activities to be team games. The teacher and classroom atmosphere have also been cited as producing positive attitudes toward physical education. Favorable attitudes are demonstrated when students have a sense of ownership in the physical education curriculum (Ennis et al, 1997; Strand & Scantling, 1994). Students also tend to perceive physical education more positively when the teacher demonstrates a caring interest in the students' personal lives (Ennis et al, 1997). Figley (1985) stated that students prefer a less competitive, more informal atmosphere. In addition, students that perceive themselves to be successful in physical education possess a more positive attitude (Luke & Sinclair, 1991).

Numerous reasons for negative attitudes toward the physical education program have been determined. Figley (1985) stated that 49.1% of negative student attitudes in physical education were related to the curriculum activities, with respondents concluding

the activities to be repetitious and irrelevant. Program content that focused on fitness exercises is also noted negatively among students, with running activities and fitness testing ranking unfavorably (Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1993). In the study conducted by Luke and Sinclair (1991), thirty-two percent of the negative statements referred to the teacher. In reference to a negative classroom atmosphere, public embarrassment was mentioned with the greatest frequency (Figley, 1985; Graham, 1995). Negative reactions toward physical education are often associated with showering and dressing out (Scantling, Strand, Lackey, & McAleese, 1995; Strand & Scantling, 1994). Figley (1985) stated, "if one were to add together the items of coed classes, lack of teacher fairness and sensitivity, a threatening atmosphere, and teacher incompetence, these collectively contribute to 21.3 % of negative attitudes in physical education" (p. 238-239). Both curriculum content and teacher behavior represent negative determinants of student attitudes that may be controllable.

In the study conducted by Figley (1985), attitude determinants toward physical education were identified through student responses. College students, 88 females and 12 males, enrolled in separate elementary school physical education courses participated in the study. The participants reflected on their K-12 physical education experiences by completing a critical incident report form. Data analysis revealed positive and negative causal determinants, with the curriculum and teacher contributing to 70% of attitude determinants. Positive responses were given for the curriculum content, teacher reinforcement, teacher's personal character, teacher assistance, and elective courses. The results suggested that the variables related to negative attitudes were within teacher control. The curriculum content, lack of teacher reinforcement, perception of public

atmosphere, rejection by peers, and the teacher's personal character were the primary negative determinants specified by the participants. Coed classes and lack of teacher equity were also mentioned as negative attitude determinants. Figley (1985) suggested that students' perceptions of their physical education experience are developed through "a complex interaction among students, teacher, content, and instruction" (p. 239). It is evident from the results that teacher interaction significantly influenced student perceptions of the physical education program.

In addition to studying attitude determinants toward physical education, Luke and Sinclair (1991) differentiated attitude determinants between genders, students opting elected physical education courses, and students not opting physical education. Eleventh grade Canadian students, 233 males and 255 females, participated in the study. Data collection methods consisted of a questionnaire and a critical incident report form. Findings of attitude determinants were similar to the study conducted by Figley (1985). The five major determinants found by Luke and Sinclair (1991) were the curriculum content, teacher behavior, class atmosphere, student self-perceptions, and facilities. Students' selection or non-selection of physical education, regardless of gender, identified the five major determinants as contributing to positive and negative attitudes with female students having a higher rate of negative statements. Female students that did not select a physical education elective had the greatest number of negative responses and identified the teacher as a major determinant of negative attitudes. Altogether, sixty-seven percent of females and 48% of males did not opt to take an elective physical education course.

Another study researched student engagement in physical education within an environment of fear and disengagement. Ennis et al (1997) conducted observations and interviews in six urban high schools to examine teachers and student perceptions toward physical education. Considerations were given to the influence of situational and personal contexts on their physical education experience. Data suggested that students' engagement with the physical education curriculum was greater when students perceived the curriculum to be meaningful, the class atmosphere to be physically and psychologically safe, and the teacher as caring. Student disengagement resulted when students perceived physical education to be "embarrassing, boring, and irrelevant in their lives" (Ennis et al, 1997, p. 60). Repetitive curriculum content combined with teachers that were perceived to be disconnected from their students led to negative attitudes toward physical education.

Though research literature on student attitude toward physical education has significantly increased, research that centers on female students' perception of physical education at the secondary level is minimal. Luke and Sinclair (1991) conducted one of the few studies that differentiate attitude responses of female and male secondary students, however the study was conducted in a Canadian school system. In addition, empirical research paradigms have dominated physical education studies (Hellison, 1988), with attitudes scales containing "predetermined criteria" being the dominant research instrument (Figley, 1985, p. 229). The use of quantitative measures that neglect gender differences has resulted in a unidimensional perspective on student attitude in secondary physical education. Further, target populations for attitudinal studies have varied from elementary, middle school, high school, to college aged students, with only a

limited number of studies on secondary physical education utilizing high school student research participants. Secondary attitude studies in physical education have also been neglected in the southeastern part of the United States.

#### Pedagogical Implications for Secondary Physical Education

Secondary physical education curriculum needs to address student perceptions of their physical education experience. Chen (1998) suggested a pluralistic curriculum that helps students internalize meanings within physical education needs to be developed. Meaningfulness in physical education requires a personal interpretation of relevancy in the act. As Chen (1998) stated:

Helping students internalize meaning and formulate meaningfulness may be a more important task for us than merely teaching the act. In other words, we need to help students transform the purpose of an act into a personal desire, turn their interest in an act into a personal striving, and bridge their knowledge and skill into willingness so that they will continuously pursue a physically active lifestyle (p. 304).

With this model, student attitudes and student behaviors toward physical education are dependent on the meaningfulness perceived within the physical education environment.

Kinchin and O'Sullivan (1999) proposed a cultural studies approach that provided a meaningful and relevant physical education experience. The purpose of the curriculum innovation was to increase student interest in physical education. The program combines the sport education model with an analysis of sport in society. Implementing cultural studies of sport into the curriculum through journal writing, class discussions, and student presentations, was seen to increase the relevancy of the sport activity in student lives.

Linking the curriculum to student reaction from the program indicated that the majority of students found the experience to be more meaningful than their traditional physical education experience.

Through this research study, pedagogical implications for increasing the meaningfulness of female students' physical education experience are suggested.

Observations of the physical education environment and responses from female students toward their physical education experience serve as the bases for curriculum innovations.

The intention of the curricula proposals are to provide female students with a more positive learning experience in physical education and to increase their physical activity level.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

This research study utilized a naturalistic paradigm to examine the multiple perceptions female students have toward their secondary physical education experience. Naturalistic research methods permit a critical examination of students' social realities within the school setting. A naturalistic process allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how students' social realities are constructed within the context of physical education. Inquiry was focused on female students' perceptions of physical education that led to an apathetic attitude toward the subject. The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. To what extent are gender socializing agents influential factors in female students' apathy toward physical education?
2. To what extent has the teacher and curricular practices affected female students' interest in physical education?
3. To what extent does female students' attitudes toward physical education affect student behavior within the subject?

The variables studied included female students' perceptions of social interactions within physical education, the curriculum and the physical setting. Race, class, and physical ability were all considered to influence student attitude toward physical education, albeit gender imposed stratification was the prominent means of examination.

Secondary female students enrolled in physical education courses and physical education teachers were the primary participants in the study.

### Context of Study

The high school examined was located in a rural county in the southeastern region of the United States. A mission statement for the school system was adopted by the board of education of the county. It was the goal of the school system to provide each student with educational opportunities in a safe and positive learning environment. The school sought to establish a positive school climate, utilize teaching strategies that met the individual needs of students and provide every student the opportunity to experience success.

The secondary school was the only high school serving the county. The school building was established in 1992. Approximately 1650 students were enrolled in the high school for the 2000-2001 school year. The student population was ninety percent white, six percent African-American, two percent Asian, and two percent Hispanic. Seven percent of the students were eligible for free lunches and two percent were eligible for reduced lunches. There were 114 certified employees and administrators in the high school, represented by one hundred eight white persons, two Hispanics, and one African-American. The school employed eight physical education teachers: five males and three females. All of the physical education instructors were white.

The high school operated on a four by four block schedule with two-eighteen week terms. College preparatory and technology/career preparatory graduation plans were offered. A passing score on all five sections of the State high school graduation test



was required for any high school diploma. The test sections consisted of language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and writing.

### Physical Education Program

School policy required students to complete one half unit of health and one half unit of physical education prior to graduation, in accordance with the state mandate. A unit consisted of nine weeks of instruction. Students were typically placed in the required physical education course during their ninth grade year. Additional physical education courses were considered electives, but not academic electives. Elective physical education courses included aerobic dance, body sculpting, physical conditioning, outdoor education, team sports, lifetime sports, weight training and sports medicine. The local requirements stated that a maximum of two physical education courses from two different areas could be counted as local electives.

### Research Participants

Three separate physical education classes were observed during the study. The classes included the required personal fitness course, team sports and weight training. There were a total of twenty-five female students enrolled in the three classes; seventeen in the required personal fitness education class, four in the elective team sports courses, and four in the elective weight training classes. The female students signed and returned a student assent form and a parental consent form prior to completing the survey. A written explanation of the research study was provided to all the female student participants with the consent and assent forms. All twenty-five female students voluntarily consented to participate in the research study and completed the open-ended questionnaire. Of the twenty-five students, one was African American and the remainder

was white students. The seventeen female students in the required personal fitness course were in the ninth grade; fifteen males students were in the ninth grade, two male students were in the tenth grade and one male student was in the eleventh grade. In the team sports class, one female student was in the tenth grade and three were in the eleventh grade. In weight training, one female student was in the ninth grade and three students were in the eleventh grade. In addition, participation from female students enrolled in non-physical education courses was solicited. Three female students from an early childhood education course and one from a business class completed the survey.

The physical education teachers were also observed during the research process. Primarily, three physical education teachers were observed. The required personal fitness teacher, team sports teacher and weight-training teacher were observed and provided information during the research on an informal basis. Two other physical education teachers were observed on a few occasions, though none of their students completed the questionnaire. One of the teachers was teaching health during the first block and the other teacher was teaching weight training. The personal fitness and team sports teachers were white females and had twenty-seven and thirteen years of teaching experience respectively. Both of the weight training teachers and the health instructor were white males. The weight-training teacher that was involved with the study had eighteen years of teaching experience.

### Data Collection

Qualitative sources of data collection were used for the study. Methods of data collection included observations, open-ended questionnaire and school documents. Observations of students enrolled in a high school physical education course, an open-

ended questionnaire that asked female students about their perception and experiences of secondary physical education, and school documents from the high school were used to collect qualitative data. Detailed documentation of physical education courses and the physical environment were recorded. Informed assent was obtained from the students and informed consent was obtained from parents and/or guardians. Benefits from participation in the study included an opportunity for students to confidentially voice their opinions concerning their secondary physical education experiences. No anticipated risk to participants involved in the research project was discerned.

Passive participant observations were conducted during the physical education class session. The researcher was positioned on the outskirts of the physical education activities to minimize distractions on student behavior. Students were observed participating in one-week units of instruction. Observations were conducted on three separate physical education classes, though most of the observations were conducted on the required personal fitness class. The observations were conducted for four weeks during the first block of the school day. The blocks were ninety minutes in length. The purpose of the observations was to describe the physical education environment, course curriculum, teacher interactions, and student behavior. Detailed field notes, along with student comments, were documented during the observational periods. Teacher comments were also documented. In addition, the researcher's concerns, questions and subjectivities that arose during the study were recorded. The field notes were later revisited and additional comments were recorded for data analysis.

The open-ended questionnaire was developed by the researcher to specifically collect data on the research questions. The survey was based on the "Ask Your Students"

section of Equity in the Gymnasium, the literature review for this study, and the researcher's teaching experiences (National Association for Girls and Women in Sport, 2000). Survey questions centered on female students' attitudes and perceptions of high school physical education, including the curriculum and class organization. The first section of the survey collected demographic information on the respondent.

Demographic information requested on the surveys included age, race, grade in high school and the physical education courses the student had taken in high school. The second section of the survey collected information regarding female students' perception of their physical education experiences at the secondary level. In addition, students were surveyed on demographic information, media interests and athletic sport involvement. Twenty questions comprised the survey, seventeen of which were open-ended. The completed questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. Experts in teacher education accessed the questionnaire to determine if the data elicited addressed the research questions.

Following the four weeks of observations, the survey was administrated to the female students enrolled in the physical education courses that had been observed. All twenty-five female physical education students completed the questionnaire during their physical education class. Student participants were allowed to take as much time as needed to answer the survey questions and were encouraged to provide explanations for their responses. The physical fitness students completed the survey in a classroom while taking a fitness chapter exam. The classroom setting would be considered as an environment conducive for completing the questionnaire, albeit the personal fitness instructor had the female students complete the survey while also being asked to take a

fitness chapter test. The teacher consistently interrupted the students to provide additional information regarding the chapter test. Female students in the team sports and weight training class were instructed to complete the survey in the gymnasium, sitting on the floor along the wall. Female students in the early childhood elementary class and one female student in the business course completed the survey in the classroom with few distractions.

Throughout the research study, school documents were collected for analysis. Curriculum guides, course syllabi and the school yearbook were examined. The Georgia Quality Core Curriculum guide for health and physical education, grades nine through twelve, was stored in the physical education office that the physical education teachers shared. The guide provided mandated content standards for health, physical fitness, individual and dual sports and lifetime activities, team sports, outdoor activities and dance. Content standards for the required physical education course included participating in fitness assessments, establishing individual fitness goals, developing a personal fitness plan, implementing the plan and accessing the outcomes. Students were also expected to pursue health related physical activities and analyze the changes of participation patterns that occur over the lifespan.

In addition, the school kept a high school course catalog document in the counselor's office located in the main office. Included in the course catalog was the school's mission statement, philosophy, high school planning program, planning beyond high school, career information, occupational trends, course descriptions and a glossary. The board of education stated that the mission of the school system was to provide each

student educational opportunities to ensure the successful development of a responsible and involved citizen.

Fifteen physical education courses were listed in the course catalog: sports medicine, introductory team sports, introductory lifetime sports, outdoor education, personal fitness, health, physical conditioning, advanced physical conditioning, aerobic dance, intermediate aerobic dance, advanced aerobic dance, weight training, advanced weight training, body sculpting and advanced body sculpting. Health and personal fitness courses were required for graduation and the other courses were electives. Course descriptions for the physical education classes were listed in the course catalog. The course description for personal fitness stated that the class provided instruction in methods of attaining a healthy level of physical fitness. Developing a lifetime fitness program based on personal fitness assessments was a primary objective of the course. In addition, the course was to stress strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, body composition and cardiovascular endurance. The description for team sports included introducing skills, strategies and rules associated with various sports. The weight training course description stated the class emphasized strength development and proper lifting techniques.

The physical education department head provided the researcher with course syllabi for personal fitness, lifetime sports and outdoor education. The course outlines included a course description, class activities per week, class procedures and the grading policy. Course grades were determined by student participation, written tests and the final exam. Skill tests were also part of the grading policy for lifetime sports.

Another document that was considered during the research study was the school yearbook. The high school yearbook was distributed to students during the research period. Textual representations and images of male and female students in the yearbook were examined. Gendered discourses found were recorded and revisited during the data analysis.

The Gender Equity in Sports Resource Manuel (2001) was also examined for data related to high school physical education. Only one statement in the manual referred to physical education. The Equity in Sports Act stated “a local system is not prohibited from grouping of students in physical education classes by gender.” Georgia high school physical education teachers have the option of structuring coeducation or non-coeducation courses. All of the physical education courses offered in the high school studied were structured as coeducational.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed to investigate female student apathy toward high school physical education. The initial data analysis was conducted on each data source independently, using constant comparison techniques. Constant comparisons and triangulation methods were used to establish trustworthiness (Merriam, 1995). Themes generated from observations, surveys and school documents were recorded. Following this analysis, the data was examined to develop common themes among all the data sources, using triangulation techniques. Triangulation methods were used to increase the credibility of the research (Mathison, 1988). The process of theme development included reexamining and revisiting the data analysis findings. Themes that emerged from the analysis related to: teacher, curriculum, school environment and female students' self-

perceptions. These themes were grounded in female students' apathy toward secondary physical education.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study was developed to investigate female student apathy toward physical education at a southeastern high school in the United States. The purpose of the study was to examine female students' perceptions of their physical education experience at the secondary level. Secondly, the study was designed to provide suggestions for curriculum and teaching practices in secondary physical education. Qualitative sources of data collection consisted of observations, surveys and school documents. Themes that emerged from the data analysis related to the teacher, curriculum, school environment and female students' self-perceptions. The following section describes the themes that emerged from the data analysis. A summary of the findings from the study is also provided.

#### Themes Related to the Teacher

Themes related to the teacher were found to be determining factors of female students' perceptions of secondary physical education. Teacher related themes that emerged included content delivery methods, comments and sensitivity. Content delivery methods involved teaching strategies utilized to facilitate learning. Instructional content delivery sub-themes consisted of student perceptions of boredom, lack of skill instructions and practice opportunities and exclusion. Teacher comments constituted discourses verbally expressed, with sub-themes of language use, male discourses and student expectations. Teacher sensitivity referred to providing students with a

psychologically safe learning environment. The sensitivity sub-theme pertained to student embarrassment in the learning environment.

Methods of Content Delivery. The physical education instructors observed utilized the command style as their instructional method. In this teaching method, the teacher makes all of the decisions and the learner follows the teacher's directions and performs the tasks (Mosston & Ashworth, 1994). For example, the weight-training teacher would instruct students to perform a lift by stating, "First person, first time, go. Second person, first time, go" (Observation notes, April 17). On another occasion, the personal fitness teacher began student warm-ups with "Exercise lines. Let's go. Hustle" (Observation notes, April 16). Command style teaching is a whole class instructional method, in which a task is performed repeatedly. Mosston and Ashworth (1994) stated, "excessive repetition of the same task may cause boredom, fatigue, or both" (p. 26). Several students reported on the survey that they did not enjoy physical education because it was boring. One personal fitness student surveyed stated, "It's mostly boring and what's not boring is hard." Another student surveyed stated, "Class gets boring after we do the same thing all day." A third student replied on the survey, "It is just drilling, it is boring and repetitive." A fourth survey response was "I don't like the fact that this class is very repetitive."

Methods of content delivery failed to include strategies to increase competencies in psychomotor skills. Throughout the observations, teachers provided directions on the task to be completed without providing instructions, skill cues, or demonstrations on how to successfully perform the skill. In the three-day basketball unit, the teacher did not provide any skill instructions to students on dribbling and shooting techniques

(Observational notes, April 30; May 1; May 3). During the personal fitness weight-training unit, the teacher did not provide any verbal directions or instructions on performing the exercises (Observational notes, May 8; May 10; May 11). Exercises were listed on the board and students enrolled in the weight training class were responsible for leading a group of personal fitness students through the exercises. Most of the female students demonstrated low ability levels in both units.

Instructional methods also lacked student opportunities for skill practice. During the basketball unit, students were instructed to participate in dribbling relays with only three basketballs for the entire class (Observational notes, April 30). Three relay lines were formed with students standing in line, waiting to participate. In addition, students were only given one opportunity to participate in the dribbling relay before students were instructed to successfully shoot the basketball into the goal at the end of the dribbling relay. Students were not given the opportunity to practice shooting before participating in the dribbling and shooting relays. On another occasion, the teacher began an ultimate Frisbee game without allowing students the opportunity to practice throwing and receiving the Frisbee (Observational notes, April 26).

In addition, content delivery methods were not inclusive of students with varying ability levels. Activity avoidance by female students resulted from exclusive instructional methods. During the weight-training unit, weights provided for several exercises exceeded the ability level of students. For example, the incline bar was too heavy for all of the female students that attempted the exercise. Students were not provided with the option to use lighter hand weights to complete the exercise. Unsuccessful attempts by female students to lift the incline bar resulted in female

students avoiding the exercise. In the basketball unit, students were instructed to play four on four half-court basketball games (Observational notes, May 3). Female students demonstrating low basketball skill levels responded with frustration when placed in a game situation. Rather than placing themselves in an unsuccessful situation, these students choose not to continue participating.

Instructional methods that involved allocation of leadership positions affected female students' involvement within physical education. Selection of squad leaders by the personal fitness teacher was based on the one-mile run and the shuttle run pre-test scores. Of the six student squad leaders in the class, five students were males and one student was female. The lack of representation of female leaders resulted in less direct involvement of female students in the physical education course.

Teacher Comments. Teacher comments were found to affect female students' physical education experiences. Language use by physical education teachers consisted of gender exclusive discourses. Gendered statements such as, "you guys get in your exercise lines" (Observational notes, April 30) when addressing the entire coeducational class and "you guys are the leaders of the pack" (Observational notes, April 16) when speaking to two female students running their three miles on the track shadowed female student existence. In addition, gendered comments by male physical educators placed female students in subordinate positions. For example, one of the male weight-training teachers informed a female student that he had marked her absent by stating, "sweetheart, I'm telling you I did" (Observational notes, April 24). The health/physical education teacher addressed a female student as "honey" (Observational notes, May 8). Gender exclusive comments placed female students in a male dominant learning environment.

Male discourses were revealed throughout physical education teachers' comments. Discourses found placed male athletics over physical education courses. Male athletics were observed taking precedence over physical education class roles and health education classes. For example, one of the weight-training teachers was not able to provide the researcher with an exact number of female students enrolled in his class. The teacher stated, "I've got about four or five female basketball players, the rest (of the female students), I pretty much took off (the other weight training teacher's) hands, so he could get something done for football. That's what were here for, right?" (Observational notes, April 17). On another occasion, the physical education/health instructor led his health class outside during first block to assist him in preparing the field for spring football practice (Observational notes, May 2). While the health teacher was mixing paint, a female student asked where the girls' soccer team would practice, since they were painting the soccer practice field for the ten day spring football practice session. The teacher responded, "Doesn't matter. Hate to break it to you, (student name), but when it comes to sports in this school football is god. Football brings in the most money and football has the biggest budget."

Teacher comments also included student expectations related to gender. Female students were expected to conform to gender socialized behaviors. One of the weight-training instructors asked a female student during class, "you want to type this up for me?" (Observational notes, April 17). The health/physical education teacher instructed a female student to "grade these papers." The personal fitness instructor labeled several females students based on participation expectations. One female student was identified as a student that "will do anything to not sweat" (Observational notes, April 16). Another

female student was labeled as being “more concerned with primping than PE”

(Observational notes, May 2).

Teacher Sensitivity. Teacher sensitivity toward students was also related to perceptions of female students toward secondary physical education. Female students that perceived the teacher as demonstrating insensitivity were apathetic toward participation. Insensitivity was described when the teacher forced students to perform in front of their peers, resulting in embarrassment. During the basketball unit, students were instructed to dribble to the other end of the court, shoot until she/he makes a basket and dribble back to the line. There were three relay lines, therefore three students performed the drill while the remainder of the students sat and observed the activity. One female student pleaded to the teacher, “do I have to do that (basketball relays), it’s extremely embarrassing” (Observational notes, April 30). Another female student surveyed stated she disliked physical education because, “a lot of it is embarrassing.” When asked on the survey what the student disliked about high school physical education, one female student responded “stuff were everyone is staring at you and it feels like everyone is laughing at me!” Another female student indicated on the survey she did not enjoy physical education “because it is embarrassing.” One questionnaire response suggested teachers “not make people do things when others are watching.” Teacher insensitivity toward providing a psychologically safe learning environment led to apathetic attitudes of female students within physical education.

#### Themes Related to the Curriculum

Themes related to the physical education curriculum were also found to be determining factors for high school female students’ perception of physical education.

Physical education curriculum related themes included content, organizational structure and atmosphere. The curriculum content considered activities taught in the physical education classes. Curriculum content sub-themes that emerged were activities perceived as masculine, irrelevant, boring, unchallenging, lacking variety and exclusive.

Organizational structure examined the arrangement of the learning environment. Sub-themes of organizational structure included coeducational classes, lumping students and lack of class structure. Atmosphere related to the tone of the classroom. The atmosphere in physical education was perceived as containing a competitive tone.

Curriculum Content. The personal fitness curriculum content consisted of traditional male dominated activities. Curriculum units included the three mile run, boot camp, basketball and weight training. Minor activities included in the curriculum units were capture the flag, ultimate Frisbee, dodge ball, free play basketball and walking. Several female students suggested increasing the variety of activities provided in the curriculum. Activity suggestions favored decreasing traditional male sports and increasing nontraditional offerings. One female surveyed stated, “There needs to be a much wider variety of exercise done in a personal fitness class, like tae-bo, kickboxing, aerobics and dance.” Another female replied on the survey, “Do a variety of sports – not just the traditional ones, such as football and basketball.” A third female survey response was, “Introduce sports that are new to the area, such as lacrosse.”

Female students avoided selecting to participate in physical education courses and activities that had traditional male dominant curriculum content. There were only four female students enrolled in the weight-training course and four female students enrolled in the team sports class, both of which consisted of male dominated curriculums. In

addition, when provided the option of participating in free play basketball, dodge ball or walking, the majority of females choose walking over the activities considered to be more masculine.

Female students indicated their dislike in curriculum activities that they perceived to be irrelevant. One female student stated on the survey she disliked activities “that have no point.” Another student responded on the questionnaire that she disliked ultimate Frisbee and boot camp because “they are boring and pointless. I hate it.” One female expressed a lack of activity relevancy when she responded on the survey, “I hate running for no reason, except to run!” Another female echoed the response by stating her disinterest in “Running for long periods of time with no point behind it.” Rationale for disinterest in physical education was provided on one female’s survey when she stated, “sometimes it seems kind of pointless.”

Perceived boredom with curriculum content by female students was also related to apathetic attitudes. One female student surveyed stated, “Basketball gets boring quick in PE.” A team sports female student surveyed stated, “I really don’t like some of the boring games we have to play.” A third female student replied on the survey, “Some of the activities we do are not fun.” A fourth female student stated on the survey, “It simply isn’t fun – the activities that we do. Exercises should not be looked at like a chore.” Another female replied on the survey, “PE can be fun, though most of the time it is boring.”

Another cause of female students’ apathetic perceptions was an unchallenging physical education curriculum. A student’s survey indicated she disliked running, because “It’s old, not challenging or new.” Another female student responded on the



questionnaire, “In high school, the activities should be more challenging and not relay races and dodge ball.” In addition, one female student stated, “we stand around more than we do things.” A fourth female student replied she disliked physical education because, “It’s just not challenging.”

Female students also indicated their disinterest in curriculum activities that excluded participation. One female student indicated she disliked activities where “people get left out.” Another student stated on the survey that she disliked activities where there was “too much competition, too many people and not everybody gets to participate.” A third female student’s questionnaire stated, “I don’t like games where people don’t get to participate.” A fourth female student responded on the survey, “I don’t like getting knocked out of dodge ball and having to sit out.”

The physical education curriculum also included coursework from the personal fitness textbook. Five days during the four observation weeks were allotted for textbook assignments. Coursework for personal fitness failed to convey relevancy to the students and led to disinterest. Students’ questionnaire comments included, “I don’t like the bookwork because it is boring” and “I don’t like doing class work in PE.” A third student stated on the survey, “I really don’t mind the class but the bookwork is stupid!” A fourth student replied on the survey, “The tests and worksheets are pointless to me and just a waste of time.” Another student’s questionnaire response was, “I dislike taking the chapter test, because they aren’t important. One student suggested on the survey, “The written work should be introduced more while we are exercising.”

Organizational Structure. Female students’ perceptions and participation within high school physical education were influenced by class organizational structures. Class

organizational structures included coeducational courses, courses that lumped students with other classes, and classes that lacked structure. Noninvolvement and negative perceptions among female students were directly related to the physical education organizational structure.

Negative perceptions by female students towards coeducational physical education were prevalent. Female students described the coeducation structure as too competitive. One female student stated, “I want an all girls PE class. I don’t mind having boys in the gym with me, but boys make it too competitive and not fun” (Observational notes, April 30). Another female student stated on the questionnaire she would prefer an all female physical education class because, “We (female students) wouldn’t be so competitive.” A second student replied on the survey, “Males get too competitive, they are ball-hogs, they are rowdy and rough.” Another student’s survey stated, “I don’t like huge guys hurling balls at my face, that isn’t my idea of getting ‘physically fit.’” A fourth student responded on the questionnaire, “Guys are too rough.” A fifth student stated on the survey, “I don’t like dodge ball. All of the guys get too involved with the game and they throw the ball hard.” Another female’s survey stated that without males in the class, “We (female students) could play things like basketball without the guys always showing us up.” One female responded on the questionnaire, “Guys make the game way too involved than it is meant to be.” Dodge ball was described on the survey by one female student as, “fun, unless the guys peg you.” One female replied on the survey, “The competitiveness of all the boys makes things no fun.”

Female students perceived male students as excluding female students from participating in coeducation physical education. One female explained exclusion when

she stated on the questionnaire “Guys don’t always involve the females in sports.”

Another female replied on the survey, “Boys make it no fun, because if they have something they’ll never give it to a girl.” One female responded on the survey, “I tend to participate more in all female classes because guys aren’t there to be ball hogs.” Another student’s questionnaire stated that in an all female class “We (females) would get to participate more.”

The structure of coeducation within secondary physical education resulted in perceptions of masculine performance standards that excluded female students. Female students perceived a male standard of performance to be the measure for success. One female student’s survey stated, “In general, guys are faster and stronger than most girls, so the guys give me something to strive for and a goal to beat them.” A second female student replied on the survey, “Guys help me to improve and play better.” Another female student stated on the questionnaire, “I like playing with guys, so I can compare myself to them.” A fourth female responded on the questionnaire, “I enjoy playing with guys, showing them what I can do.” The performance dichotomy was based on gender, rather than skill level. Previous practice opportunities and instructions were not considered to be factors in the level of skill performance. Female students perceived male students to naturally be more skilled than females.

Passivity among female students in coeducation physical education was also observed. Female students demonstrated passive participation when they avoided dominant positions in games. During the capture the flag activity, only one player from each team was allowed to guard the team flag (Observational notes, April 19). Male students played the guard position for both teams. Female students stood stationary in

game play during the basketball unit, allowing male students to control the basketball. Passivity was also illustrated in a weight-training unit. During the class, a female student leading a coed group in weight-training exercises informed a male student “you missed stair hops” (Observational notes, May 8). The male student responded, “Just put me down for it.” The female student assumed a subordinate position and did not require the male student to complete the assigned exercises. Implicit assumptions of subordination were also revealed during attendance role call. For example, three different male students asked three different female students to provide the physical education teacher their number for attendance one day. The male students stated, “tell her (male student’s attendance number) when you sign in” (Observational notes, April 24). Female students would wait and sign themselves and the male students in while the male students went to participate in basketball free play. No female student observed requested a male student to sign them in. Coeducation influenced the development of female passivity in secondary physical education.

Female students were apprehensive toward participation in coeducation physical education. Female apprehension in physical education was due to feeling conscientious in front of male students. One female stated on the questionnaire, “I think that the females who do not participated in class do not like the fact that a lot of guys are in there with them because they will be worrying about what the guys will think and they will try to impress them.” A second female’s survey stated, “Some girls who dislike physical education may like the class better without guys, because they won’t worry about what guys think and work harder for themselves and have more fun.” A third female supported this claim by stating on the survey, “A class with guys is more distracting –

people worry too much about how they look in front of the opposite sex.” Another female student responded on the questionnaire, “Some girls are nervous around guys. They (males) may look at how much or how little the girl is lifting.” The negative coeducational physical education perceptions of competitiveness, exclusion and apprehension were directly related to decreased female involvement in physical education.

Participation among female students also declined when the class lacked an organized structure and students were lumped together with other physical education classes. Students enrolled in personal fitness, weight training and team sports were often intermixed during the physical education period. Lumping classes and providing students with a limited choice to participate in free play basketball, elimination dodge ball or walking was a common occurrence that was noted in a third of the observations. For example, the weight training teacher would state, “You have twenty-eight minutes till you get dressed. You will be active. Choose one of the three activities: basketball, dodge ball or walk” (Observational notes, April 17). During coursework days, students that had completed their assignment were given the option to “shoot hoops” or “walk and talk” (Observational notes, April 18; May 7; May 11; May 15). On one occasion, the personal fitness instructor provided students with the option to “lay around like a lounge lizard or play with what’s in the bag” (Observational notes, April 23). The bag contained one soccer ball, two footballs and a wiffle ball and bat. The majority of female students either selected the lesser masculine activity and walked or withdrew from involvement in any type of physical activity.

Structure of physical education course offerings was also a contributing factor to female students' experiences within high school physical education. Though the course catalog listed fifteen physical education classes, fifteen courses were not offered each semester. When the minimum number of students registered for a select course was not reached, physical education elective courses were combined with other physical education electives. For example, students registered for body sculpting were lumped with students registered for weight training. Therefore, students were not receiving the course content for the course they were enrolled. Arrangement of the learning environment directly affected female students' interest in physical education.

Atmosphere. Atmosphere was another aspect of the curriculum that increased female students' apathy toward physical education. The competitive tone established in physical education increased apathetic attitudes while decreasing skill performance and activity involvement. In addition to the speed relays in the basketball unit, basketball stations were provided for student learning. Of the six stations, five involved some type of competition (Observational notes, May 1). The dodge ball activity also created a competitive environment in which to participate, as students were eliminated from the game. One female student decided not to reenter the dodge ball game, stating, "let's pretend I'm out already" (Observational notes, April 30). Another female student responded, "Most females just stand out there in the beginning and pretend to be in the game (dodge ball), then walk over to the side when the game begins" (Observational notes, April 30). One female student stated on the survey that she disliked dodge ball and kickball because the activities were "too competitive." Another female replied on the survey, "I don't like doing relay races. I am not good at trying to dribble a basketball and

race somebody at the same time.” When surveyed on how to increase female student participation in physical education, one female student responded, “Not make it a competition.” Another female student’s questionnaire suggested, “Make PE more fun, less competing.” A third female student stated on the survey, “Make it so it’s not so competitive.”

### Themes Related to the School Environment

Another determinant of female students’ experiences within high school physical education were themes related to the school environment. School environment themes included the physical setting and the marginalization of physical education. The physical setting consisted of gender representations present throughout the school facility. The marginality of physical education considered the value of physical education within the school environment. Male representations and athletic values were prominent in the school environment.

Physical Setting. Gendered representations were prevalent in the high school physical setting. Throughout the school facilities a Native American mascot was displayed. The mascot was a male, muscular figure that the school used to symbolize school pride. A mural of the mascot was painted on the gymnasium wall and the face of the mascot was on the center of the gymnasium floor. During the research, an article concerning the mascot was printed in the local newspaper. Controversy concerning the mascot as being insensitive to Native American culture was addressed, though the only public responses printed supported the mascot. The next day, a letter to the newspaper editor stated, “Last time I checked, the (high school) had not identified with any particular tribe or nation, so who is being offended? Has someone of Native American

heritage complained? On what basis? Is the committee stereotyping Native Americans as a collection of people so inept at representing themselves that they need some politically correct committee to rescue them?" Issues of gender insensitivities in regards to the mascot were not mentioned.

The weight room facility served as an icon for male athletics. Eighteen photos of male athletes covered the walls. Accomplishments of the football players from the high school were also displayed in the room. A poster placed above the drinking fountain stated, "A champion must have the desire for perfection, and the will to punish *himself* in the process (italicized for emphasis). Words of wisdom." The design on the PowerAde machine inside the weight room was a cartoon outline of a muscular, male soccer player. In addition, background music from a local radio station played during weight training classes. The morning talk show on the station included a daily "Hee Whore Award." During one of the morning shows, the radio broadcaster spoke of a male celebrity who whispered into a female celebrity's ear, "I like your boobs" (Observational notes, May 10). Male athletic images dominated the facility with no female representations, except for objectifying radio statements.

Included in the school environment was the published school yearbook. The cover to the high school yearbook was a washed blue, with the school name, year, mascot and yearbook motto printed on the front. The motto for the yearbook was "playing with the BIG boys." On the first page, students surrounded the high school initials: two white males were in front with two black and three white females behind the male students. On the second and third page, the motto was followed by "our school has leaped into the AAAA division on the PLAYing field in both boy's and girl's athletics, in academics,



and in the size of the student body. The BOYS on the team prepared to PLAY their hardest as they recovered from a change in coaching staff and faced the BIGgest games of the season. Our seniors faced little time to PLAY as they dealt with advanced placement classes and college applications. Our underclassmen struggled with the BIG issues high school presented. Each individual remained to be an important part, as the student body came together for a year of PLAYING WITH THE BIG BOYS.”

Throughout the yearbook, male football players were represented as the most important part of the student body as the entire student population was categorized under the umbrellas of playing with the big boys. Playing with the big girls, or any motto that represented female students, was not mentioned in the yearbook.

Marginalization of Physical Education. The school environment portrayed high school athletics to be more valued than physical education. The marginality of physical education was displayed throughout the high school gymnasium. The gymnasium decorated the rafters with athletic championship banners. Full size state championship team photos from girls’ track, fast pitch softball, boys’ cross country, boys’ tennis, and football surrounded the gymnasium ceiling. The physical education hallway bulletin boards were used to post male athletic scholarship opportunities and weight training records from the football players. The absence of postings related to physical education marginalized its importance in the high school, while the school environment exemplified male athletics.

Physical education teachers and students reiterated the marginality of physical education. The team sports teacher stated, “PE doesn’t really count, it’s just something the kids do” (Observational notes, April 19). One female student surveyed stated, “Most

people take physical education as a slack class.” Another female stated on the survey, “It’s an easy grade and an easy class.” A male student that was instructed to return to his weight training class responded, “I have a game today” (Observational notes, May 1). The athletic game scheduled for after school excused the student from participating in weight training. Academic expectations and performance outcomes for physical education were minimal, furthering the marginality of the subject in the school environment.

### Themes Related to Female Student Self-Perceptions

Themes related to female students’ self-perceptions were also a causal determinant of apathetic behavior toward secondary physical education. Female student self-perceptions related themes included perceptions of skill competence and perceptions of self as a female. Self-perceptions of female students’ skill competencies involved notions of skill deficiencies. Perceptions of self as a female related to feminine socialized conceptions.

Perceptions of Skill Competence. Female students’ negative self-perceptions of skill competence in secondary physical education were prominent. Self-perceptions of skill deficiencies amid female students were continually self-proclaimed. One female student stated, “I don’t like this game (ultimate Frisbee). I can’t catch a Frisbee” (Observational notes, April 26). At a basketball shooting station, a female student replied, “I suck” (Observational notes, April 30). Another female student responded on the survey, “I’m sure I’d like weight training, if I could do it.” A female student provided rationale for dislike in physical education by stating on the survey, “I suck at it.” One female student replied on the questionnaire, “I like shooting (basketball) even if I suck at

it.” Another female stated, “That’s why I don’t play basketball. I can’t shoot the ball” (Observational notes, April 30). Female students took personal responsibility for skills deficiencies.

Perceptions of Self as a Female. Female students’ self-perceptions as a female reiterated socialized feminine conceptions. Females identified themselves as delicate, incapable and disinterested in activities considered socially to be masculine. One female student’s survey stated, “We (female students) hold them (male students) back. They can’t play games like baseball, football, etc., because we (female students) don’t play those and they (male students) have to be more ‘careful’ with girls.” Another female student responded on the survey, “Guys prefer playing more sports that girls aren’t interested in.” A third female student replied on the questionnaire, “Boot camp is something guys can do that girls can’t.” A fourth female student’s survey explained, “Guys and girls prefer or have interests in different physical activities.” A fifth female student stated on the questionnaire, “I think football is a sport where guys and girls should not play together, but I think girls should play football too, two-hand touch.” A female weight-training student informed a male student, “You can do girly push-ups if you want” (Observational notes, April 19). One female student surveyed favored an all female physical education class because, “We could have aerobics and stuff that girls like.” Another female student stated on the questionnaire, “Girls don’t want to play games guys do.” One female student replied on the survey, “We can’t play rough sports, like football.” Female students perceived themselves as bound to the limitations of femininity. These perceptions led to apathetic attitudes toward physical education activities identified as masculine.

Female students' self-perceptions as a female reproduces socialized feminine conceptions of physical appearances. Female students conceptualized sweat as a disagreeable attribute. One female student stated on the questionnaire she disliked physical education because, "I don't like getting sweaty and messing up my hair, first thing in the morning." A second female student replied on the survey, "I don't like getting hot and sweaty first period." A third female student's questionnaire stated, "I hate that it's in the morning, it makes me feel gross all day." On picture day, two female students earnestly begged not to go outside during class, stating, "We don't want to go outside and get all nasty" (Observational notes, April 19). Another female student responded on the survey, "I don't like getting sweaty and dirty when I have other classes to go to." One female student surveyed stated she did not enjoy physical education because, "You get sweaty and you pretty much stink the rest of the day!" Negative perceptions from female students regarding sweating were directly related to noninvolvement in and apathy towards physical education.

### Minor Themes

Minor themes of female students' apathy toward secondary physical education also emerged. The themes did not conform to the thematic categories related to the teacher, curriculum, school environment and self-perceptions. Themes found in the physical education environment included utilizing exercise as punishment, the locker room facility and homophobic behavior. These minor themes influenced female students' apathetic perceptions of secondary physical education.

Exercise as Punishment. Teachers were observed threatening to increase students' exercise assignments as punishment during the study. Running was routinely

used as a threatening device to increase student participation. Statements, such as, “I’ve got enough exercise for the whole period, if you don’t get going” (Observational notes, April 24) and I’ll add more time to run, let’s go, pick up the pace” (Observational notes, May 8) were common. Punishing students with exercise led to an increase in apathetic attitudes towards the activity.

Locker Room Facility. Several female students identified the locker room facility as a reason for disliking physical education. One female student stated on the questionnaire, “The locker rooms are disgusting.” Another female student surveyed responded, “I would not take a shower in those locker rooms, they’re gross.” One female student recommended on the survey, “We need cleaner locker rooms for changing clothes.” A fourth female student’s questionnaire suggested, “Cleaner locker rooms to change out in.” The negative perceptions of the locker room were transferred to the physical education class, resulting in apathy toward the subject.

Homophobic Behavior. Incidents of homophobic behavior among female students were recorded during the study. On one occasion, a female student asked another female student “Would you rather get run over by a bus, or make out with (a female student)?” (Observational notes, April 25). The female student asking the question stated she would rather die than kiss another female. The second incident occurred in the classroom, while students were completing coursework assignments. A female student wrote on the chalkboard, “(Female student) is a lesbian” (Observational notes, May 9). The female receiving the accusation stated, “Quit writing bad things about me on the chalkboard.” Homophobia constrained female students’ actions within physical education. To prevent homosexual accusations, many female students may have

avoided participation and interest in physical education activities considered to be masculine.

### Conclusion

The study was designed to examine female students' apathy toward secondary physical education. Qualitative analysis was conducted on observational data, survey responses, and school documentations. Data sources were converged to identify common themes. Themes emerged from the data analysis related to: teacher, curriculum, school environment and female students' self-perceptions. Female students' negative perceptions of physical education led to noninvolvement and apathetic attitudes physical education. This chapter provided a detailed description of the thematic results found in the study.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Previous studies examining female students' perceptions toward secondary physical education in the Southeastern United States are limited. This study was developed to investigate the extent to which apathy by female students may both be imposed by the educational institution and the individual. The purpose of the study was to deconstruct female students' perceptions on their physical education experiences that led to their disinterest in secondary physical education. Secondly, the study was designed to provide suggestions for curriculum and teaching practices that promote female students' involvement in secondary physical education, and encourage positive perceptions of the program. The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. To what extent are gender socializing agents influential factors in female students' apathy toward physical education?
2. To what extent has the teacher and curricular practices affected female students' interest in physical education?
3. To what extent does female students' attitudes toward physical education affect student behavior within the subject?

Qualitative sources of data collection were used for the study. Observations of students enrolled in high school physical education courses, an open-ended questionnaire that asked female students about their perception and experiences of secondary physical

education, and school documents found within the school environment were used to collect qualitative data. Themes that emerged from the research study were related to: teacher behavior, curriculum, school environment and female students' self-perceptions. These themes were grounded in female students' apathy toward secondary physical education.

Critical feminist analysis of the research results revealed female students' apathy to be related to hierarchical stratification within secondary physical education. Stratified interactions were demonstrated between the teachers and students, male and female students, and "academic" courses and physical education. Physical education instructors maintained a dominant social position over students in physical education. Male students were provided social privileges over female students. In addition, "academic" courses and athletics were valued over physical education. The aggregated hierarchical divisions placed female students in physical education in a lower social stratum. Negative perceptions of secondary physical education were a direct resultant of female students' social status in the schooling environment.

This chapter presents discussions of the research findings. First, stratified practices found within the physical education environment are discussed with respect to the research question, previous literature and themes that emerged from the study. Secondly, implications and recommendations regarding teaching and curriculum practices for transformative pedagogy are presented. Third, areas of further research that addresses female students' apathetic perceptions toward secondary physical education with regards to patriarchal ideologies are discussed.



### Themes Related to the Teacher

Female students' apathetic perceptions of secondary physical education directly corresponded to teaching practices. Themes related to the teacher included methods of content delivery, comments and sensitivity. Teachers were found to reinforce stratified social relations that placed female students in subordinate positions. Inequities within the social structure were reproduced in physical education. Female student perceptions of and involvement in physical education were lessened by the dominant authoritarian teaching styles and male hegemonic discourses present in the learning environment.

Authoritarian teaching styles were used to deliver course content knowledge. The command style of teaching utilized by the physical education teachers consisted of teacher-centered, repetitive instructions. Student involvement was restricted to the task as defined by the teacher. Schempp, Cheffers and Zaichkowsky (1983) found teacher-centered methods of instruction to be correlated with negative student perceptions in physical education. A study conducted by Scantling et al (1995) indicated dislike of physical education by students was related to its repetitiveness. In this study, authoritarian styles of content delivery produced boredom among female students. Several female students cited on the survey that PE was boring. Dislike of and noninvolvement within physical education was related to student perceptions of boredom. Chen (1997) cited boredom as a form of resistance toward secondary physical education. Oppressive modes of content delivery fostered boredom and resistance among female students toward physical education.

Authoritarian instructional methods were merged with competitive activity content. Teachers assumed the role of referee or official during team games, as students

were placed in player positions. Sport specific rules and regulations for activity involvement were enforced on students. One female student commented to another student during a team sports activity, “Ever notice how P.E. is like prison? The teachers stand around like prison guards, watching and yelling at us to move” (Observational notes, April 18). Teachers assumed the role of enforcer to engage student learning. Dictating instructions to students during physical education led to disengagement and resistant participation by female students.

Content delivery stratified students based on previous skill learning experiences. Scranton (1990) suggested female students enter the physical education environment with fewer skill-learning experiences and are systematically disadvantaged. Teaching strategies that omitted skill instructions and practice opportunities when delivering content knowledge privileged male students while depriving female students of skill learning. Dichotomized skill competency levels present when students entered the physical education environment were maintained. Disadvantaged female students responded with what Fernandez-Balboa (1993) described as “minimal compliance” and “lack of involvement” (p. 235).

The lack of inclusive teaching methods of content delivery constructed a solitary standard of performance. Rather than providing multiple levels of performance per task, a single standard design was presented to students. The standard of performance delivered to students was based on a male standard of elite, competitive performance. For example, during the basketball unit students were expected to compete in a game situation without practice opportunities. Students’ performances were based on their ability to score a basket in the competitive game. Kirk (1992) suggested male defined

physical activities within physical education justified elitist conceptions through accolades of high level sport performance. This method of content delivery only rewarded high-level performers. Students were stratified according to performance successes and performance failures. Female students in personal fitness performed unsuccessfully in the competitive activities that dominated the course and were less rewarded in the male conceptualized weight-training unit. With exclusive male standards of performances required to be successful, female students identified with the lower status position and avoided participation in curriculum activities.

Male elitism was furthered through teaching methods used to allocate leadership positions within physical education. The personal fitness instructor rewarded male students at the higher end of the performance strata with dominant role positions and expected female students at lower strata to be followers. Squad leaders determined by fitness tests scores calculated from running speed capacities rewarded male student performances. The unspoken truth that all persons are not created equally and those with superior performance levels will become leaders in society was reinforced. As Fernandez-Balboa (1993) stated, “Elitism is based on the assumption that all ‘men’ are *not* created equal” (p. 234). Female students were underrepresented in physical education leadership positions and were predominately characterized as followers. This phenomenon reiterated females’ status within society.

Female student apathetic perceptions were related to physical education teachers’ gendered comments. Language usage by teachers was found to contain hidden messages concerning male superiority. Comments directed at female students, such as “darling” and “sweetheart,” placed females in subordinate roles (Observational notes, April 24;

May 8). Discourses that reinforced the precedence of male athletics over female athletics and physical education courses furthered female inferiority in the school setting. Other studies have identified teacher feedback as favoring male students (Davidson, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). In this study, teacher feedback was not recognized as privileging male students or serving as a negative attitude determinant. Female students' survey responses failed to recognize male discourses within teacher comments as adversarial toward their physical education experience. The gendered comments by teachers were unchallenged by female students. Nonetheless, female students' experiences within the physical education environment were negatively affected by the male hegemonic messages given by teachers.

Teacher comments concerning student expectations were found to favor male students. Elite levels of performance by male students were praised, while female students were encouraged with "Keep trying. You can do it" (Observational notes, May 10). Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Wright (1995) where physical education teachers were found to encourage female students to demonstrate minimum standards of performance. Hutchinson (1995) also reported lower expectations demonstrated by physical education teachers toward female students. Teachers' conveyed lower expectations that led to a self-fulfilling prophecy among female students in physical education.

Teacher sensitivity correlated with female students' negative perceptions of their physical education experiences. Female students perceived physical education as a publicly embarrassing environment through forced participation. Figley (1985) found public atmosphere ranked third as a negative determinant within physical education.

Hurst (1986) also found similar results with public embarrassment a causal factor in negative student perceptions of physical education. Teacher insensitivity toward the psychological climate of physical education was demonstrated through forced participation. For example, students were forced to participate in basketball dribbling and shooting relays, three mile run, boot camp activities and weight training exercises. Forcing student participation furthered hierarchical social relations between the teacher and students. Again, female students were represented in the lower social order.

#### Themes Related to the Curriculum

Themes related to the teacher and curricula were interrelated within the physical education environment. The teacher had the capacity to choose the curriculum content knowledge implemented in physical education. Themes related to the curriculum included content, organizational structure and atmosphere. Gendered teaching practices and curricular choices instigated by the teacher legitimized male discourses within physical education. Female students apathetic perceptions toward secondary physical education directly corresponded to the imposed patriarchal learning environment that placed them in the lower social strata.

Curriculum content in the physical education courses privileged male students by creating a competitive atmosphere. Traditional sports ethos with masculine underpinnings dominated the curriculum content. Units of instruction, such as boot camp, basketball, weight training and dodge ball, reproduced male discourses within the physical education environment. In addition, activity choices, such as free play basketball and dodge ball, maintained a competitive tone in physical education. Team sports and competitive activities have been found to be negative attitude determinants

(Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Figley, 1985). In study conducted by Rice (1998), female students indicated a preference for team sport activities. Albeit, Strand & Scantling (1994) found only three of the top ten preferred activities by females to be competitive team activities. Kirk (1992) suggested aggressive, competitive sports have conventionally been a male domain within society. Inequitable social relations between males and females were reproduced by the traditional sport curriculum content.

Masculine conceptions within physical education curriculum content created a resistant learning environment for females. Male dominated curriculum activities perceived by female students as irrelevant and boring were directly related with apathetic attitudes toward physical education. In one study, negative responses concerning physical education correlated with activities perceived as meaningless and repetitive (Figley, 1985). Chen (1997) found perceived boredom to be a form of resisting physical education curriculum. In this study, negative attitudes toward physical education also included perceptions of an unchallenging, repetitive and excluding curriculum content. The curriculum activities implemented by the teacher resulted in female students' disengagement in physical education. Inactivity in curriculum activities served as a means of resistance toward the masculine social environment imposed on female students. Wright (1995) suggested female students were expected to be resistant when positioned within a patriarchal learning environment. When female students were engaged, they demonstrated a passive and apprehensive existence. In addition, female students were reluctant in challenging the gendered discourses embedded in the physical education curriculum content.

Curriculum activities conceived as non-masculine reinforced male hegemonic perceptions. Non-masculine activities offered in the personal fitness class were primarily jogging and walking. Running activities have been found to be the least preferred student activities and resulted in negative physical education experiences (Stand and Scantling, 1994; Luke and Sinclair, 1991). In this study, positive and negative survey responses from female students toward running and walking were found. Albeit, female students failed to recognize the feminine-masculine dichotomy established from the curriculum offerings. Gender stratification among students was hidden by offering both sexes the opportunity to participate in gender stereotyped curriculum activities.

The absence of cooperative activities within the curriculum content sent a message of valued social knowledge that privileged male students. Omitting cooperative activities in the curriculum made a statement of its devalued status in physical education. Physical education teachers discretely taught students that competitive activities, conceptualized socially as masculine, were more valuable. Female students' apathetic involvement in physical education may be caused from the trivialization of cooperative curriculum content.

The organization structure of coeducational physical education courses furthered the marginalized social position of female students. Female students' negative perceptions of coeducation directly corresponded to their limited existence in curriculum activities. In this study, male students dominated participation opportunities in the coeducational setting. Male students accepted dominate roles in activities and limited female students' involvement. In a study by Scantling (1995), female students indicated their dislike toward physical education was due to male students dominating the

activities. Griffin (1989b) found male students leading dominant roles of participation in physical education. Research conducted by Lirgy (1994) found male students to be more competitively active in coeducational physical education. In addition, Bischoff (1982) found males students to be more competitive in team sport situations. Luke and Sinclair (1991) found negative attitudes toward physical education to be related to a coed and competitive environment. Figley (1985) also found a competitive atmosphere to be a negative attitude determinant toward physical education. With competitive, masculine activities occupying the curriculum content, the dominance of male students involvement is not unexpected. Similarly, female students resistant engagement and apathy toward physical education is not unanticipated.

Passivity among female students in physical education is a direct resultant of the competitive, coeducational environment. Female students conformed to gender conceptions by accepting less active roles. Griffin (1984) found female students participation to be non-aggressive. Griffin (1989b) suggested the dichotomy between male and female students increased in coeducational environment, with male students leading dominant roles of participation while females accepted passive roles. Female students preference for curriculum activities, such as running and walking, may be related to the lack of competition involved in the activities. Female students are able to participate without defying competing gender assumptions. Luke and Sinclair (1991) found negative attitudes to be related to coed and competitive learning environments. Figley (1985) found coeducational combined with a lack of teacher equity as the sixth ranked negative attitude determinant in physical education. A definite correlation



between female students' apathetic perceptions of physical education and the structure of coeducation physical education existed.

Female students' perceptions of coeducational physical education were found in this study to reproduce misconceptions of equality. Equal opportunities were presumed to occur when female and male students were placed in the same learning environment. Several female students advocated coeducational physical education as essential for gender equitable classes. Rationale for coeducational physical education was provided by one female student surveyed, who stated that, "Everyone should have equal opportunity." A second female student responded on the survey, "Females should have the same opportunities as males, vice-versa." Another female student replied on the questionnaire, "Girls should be allowed to do the same things as guys." A fourth female student surveyed responded, "There is equal opportunity," in regards to coeducational classes. A fifth female student replied on the survey, "PE is for both sexes, so there should be equal opportunities." Female students assumed that gender-segregated physical education did not provide equitable learning.

This finding contradicted female students' survey responses of male students excluding females from participating in coeducational physical education. Female students stated in the survey that male students prevented female students from involvement in activities and were "ball hogs." Chepyator-Thomson and Ennis (1997) found female students to be indirectly excluded from participation in team games. Female students also stated male students interfered with opportunities for females to participate (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis, 1997). Female students failed to acknowledge the inequitable learning opportunities that occurred through male domination in

coeducational physical education. As Nilges (1998) stated, “problems of patriarchal inequity quickly supersede the liberal veil of emancipatory success overtly implied by an equal access environment” (p. 175). Gender inequities were hidden under the assumption of equality in a gender integrated learning environment. Patriarchal constraints developed from coeducational physical education reproduced gender inequities concealed in the social context.

This study suggested the lack of organization structure as demonstrated by lumping physical education classes reinforced male hegemonic ideologies. Gender stratification was furthered when male and female students lumped together in gendered activities. When students were provided with the activity choices of free play basketball, dodge ball or walking, female students were forced to choose between activities conceptualized as masculine or feminine. Choosing free play basketball or dodge ball required female students to resist socially contrived notions of femininity. Female students’ in physical education had the tendency to conform to gender standards and choose the least masculine activity option.

#### Themes Related to the School Environment

Themes related to the school environment included the physical setting and the marginality of physical education. Male representations dominated the school environment. In addition, physical education was conceptualized as secondary in the school environment to school male athletics and “academic” courses. Female students’ lived experiences within physical education were directly affected by the patriarchal ideologies embedded in the school environment.

Male representations throughout the school environment placed male students in a hierarchal social position over female students. The school mascot proudly represented the high school's insensitivities toward gender equity. Photos of male athletes dominated the weight room facility without one female representation. In addition, the school yearbook promoted the slogan "playing with the BIG boys." Excluding female representation in the school environment sent a message of male superiority. The marginality of female students within the school setting positioned females in the lower social strata. The positioning is reproduced in social relations within society.

The subject of physical education was stratified within the educational institution. Courses conceptualized as academic were presented as being valued over physical education. High school graduation requirements reiterated the value of physical education in schools. Only requiring students to compete one half credit of physical education in four years of high school minimizes physical education as a subject matter. Kirk (1992) stated that forcing students to choose academic courses over physical education courses was a process that imputes a valuation. In a study conducted by Scantling et al (1995), students stated the reason for not opting to enroll in elective physical education courses was due to college preparatory requirements for high school graduation. Evans (1993) suggested educational institutions perceived physical education as a dispensable school subject. Students have been found failing to perceive the importance of physical education. In a study conducted by Stand and Scantling (1994), 83% of female respondents agreed with the proposal of extracurricular activities providing physical education credit. In this study, only one female student responded in a

similar manner. Nonetheless, the marginal status of physical education in the school curriculum was reflected in the negative perceptions of the subject.

In addition, high school male athletics were viewed as more valuable than physical education. The weight training classes segregated students based on school athletic team involvement. Male football players were segregated to allow the physical education teacher the opportunity to physically train the students for football. A male student was excused from participation in physical education when he had an athletic game scheduled for later in the day. The importance of male athletics was summed up when the health instructor was preparing football practice fields during his health class. The teacher stated, “When it comes to sports in this school football is god.” Female athletics were found insignificant in comparison to male sports. Female students were provided a devalued existence in physical education.

#### Themes Related to Female Student Self-Perceptions

Female students’ self-perceptions were also impacted by the patriarchal discourses in physical education. Female student self-perceptions were categorized into perceptions of skill competence and perceptions of self as a female. Self-perceptions of female students’ skill competencies involved notions of skill deficiencies. Perceptions of self as a female related to feminine socialized conceptions that restricted female students involvement in physical education.

Male standards of performance directly related to female students’ perceived skill incompetencies. Perceptions of skill deficiencies led female students to disassociate with activity involvement. For example, lower skilled female students were observed exiting the dodge ball activity and basketball shooting game prior to being eliminated

(Observational notes, April 17; May 11). Bain (1985) suggested ideologies of competent sport performances intimidate and restrict female participation. In addition, Lirgy (1992) found student participation levels to increase when students perceived selves as competent. Figley (1985) stated, "The perceptions of self as successful is obviously a plus for positive attitudes; however, participating in activities in which one does not stand out as incompetent may provide the student with a sense of success due to the absence of failure" (p. 237-238). Female students were forced to conform to male standards of achievement to be successful in physical education. Negative perceptions of physical education were linked with female students incompetent skill perceptions. Female students stating, "I suck" in physical education are not likely to have positive attitudes toward the subject. Female students participation within and apathetic perception of physical education was in direct response to the exclusive teaching practices, gendered curriculum content and absences of female representation in the physical education environment.

Female students' perceptions as a female complied with social conceptions of femininity. Sweat was perceived as a negative attribute to physical activity involvement. This finding was not prominent in previous studies on student attitude determinants toward physical education (Luke and Sinclair, 1991; Figley, 1985; Rice, 1988). However, in this study, several females mentioned sweating in a negative manner. Female students' concern with their physical appearance regulated the extent of their participation within physical education. Nonparticipation within and apathetic perceptions of physical education stemmed from female students' perceptions of selves in relation to feminine conceptions.

In summation, gender exclusive schooling practices impacted female students' lived experiences within physical education. Knowledge consciously and unconsciously imparted and omitted from the learning process was reflective of patriarchal ideologies within the social context at large. Female students were sent implicit messages of male hegemonic societal values. Fernandez-Balboa (1993) stated:

Through the hidden curriculum in physical education, we are socialized and socialize others into accepting particular modes of thinking and acting that support and legitimize power structures and social inequalities. These modes are characterized by apathy, indifference, apolitical attitudes, dependence on institutional control, compliance with authority, anxiety, and powerlessness (p. 248).

Kirk (1992) defined the hidden curriculum as “knowledge, attitudes, and so on that students learn as an unavoidable and unintentional consequence of participating in the formal, routine activities of the school” (p. 122). Apathetic perceptions toward physical education by female students were related to the gendered messages hidden within the physical education environment. Gender sensitive practices that provides equitable learning and social relations needs to be implemented within secondary physical education to emancipate female students from oppressive conceptions of femininity within physical education and society.

### Concluding Remarks

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions are warranted:

1. The school serves as a mechanism for transmitting values concerning social relations. Female students perceptions of and involvement in secondary

physical education is directly related to their imposed social position in the learning environment. Female students were placed in a lower social position than the teacher and male students. In addition, physical education was a less valued subject in the school curriculum. The aggregated messages of female students' social status led to apathetic perceptions of and resistant involvement in secondary physical education

2. Teaching practices, curricula patterns and the school environment reproduced patriarchal ideologies. Interactions among the teacher, curriculum and school environment inoculated female students with messages of male superiority and female inferiority. The male hegemonic discourses embedded in physical education excluded female students' experiences within physical education.
3. Teaching strategies and curriculum content restricted female students' involvement in physical education. Authoritarian methods of instruction combined with male dominated curriculum content decreased female students' participation levels. Teaching strategies should incorporate more cooperative methods of instruction. In addition, curriculum content should be revamped to increase the variety of physical education activities; incorporating more cooperative, nontraditional activities that are gender sensitive.
4. Patriarchal ideologies within physical education were hidden from female students' consciousness. Messages of male power structures were unrecognized by female students. Physical education failed to provide emancipatory opportunities for female students oppressed by the gender inequitable social environment.

5. Female students in physical education were forced to either resist participation in the masculine activities that dominated the curriculum or resist socially contrived feminine participation expectations that limited the extent of their involvement in the subject. Female students tended to conform to feminine social conceptions, rather than demonstrate oppositional behaviors by participating in masculine defined activities. This behavior failed to challenge the existing social order that privilege male students.
6. Coeducational physical education does not equate to a gender inclusive learning environment. Access to the male power structures does not negate social forces that suppress females. The established positioning of female students as inferior oppressed female students' experiences in coeducation physical education.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Based on this study, the following recommendations for future research in female students' apathy toward secondary physical education are suggested:

1. Future research should examine issues of race and class in the context of female students' apathy toward secondary physical education.
2. Revise the female student survey in this study to address gender sensitive concerns in physical education. Revisions may include perceptions of equality in the learning environment. The survey may also be conducted through interview sessions to further probe female students' responses.
3. Develop a research study on pre-service and in-service teacher education concerning gender sensitive strategies. Current teacher education should be



examined, in order to provide pedagogical suggestions for creating gender fair learning environments within teacher education programs.

4. Examine how media influences affect female students' perceptions of physical activity involvement in physical education. Media influences related to female students' perception of selves and perception of selves as female should be included.
5. Instigate an analysis of female students' unconscious acceptance of gender roles. Methods of raising the level of female students' consciousness that emancipates females from gender oppressive relations should be studied.
6. Conduct additional research on the presence of male representations and the absence of female representation in the school environment. Within the school environment, school mascots and yearbooks should be studied further to examine the transmission of male discourses.
7. Complete this study on high school female students that opted not to enroll in elective physical education courses to examine additional reasons for apathetic attitudes toward secondary physical education.
8. Expand this study to investigate female students' apathy in regards to patriarchal discourses in other academic disciplines.

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APPENDIX A

FEMALE STUDENT PHYSICAL EDUCATION SURVEY

### Female Student Physical Education Survey

**Please circle your answers to the following:**

Age:	13	14	15	16	17	18
Race:	African-American	Asian	White	Hispanic	Other: _____	
Grade:	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>		

Is this physical education class required for graduation?      Yes                  No

Is this physical education class an elective?                          Yes                  No

Circle all the physical education classes you have taken in high school:

Personal Fitness	Advanced Body Sculpting	Lifetime Sports
Aerobic Dance	Physical Conditioning	Weight Training
Intermediate Aerobic Dance	Advanced Physical Conditioning	Adv. Weight Training
Advanced Aerobic Dance	Outdoor Education	
Body Sculpting	Team Sports	

Do you plan on taking another high school physical education class?      Yes                  No

If yes, which one(s)?

Why?

**Please answer the following questions, providing explanations for your answers.**

1. Do you enjoy physical education in high school?

Why?

2. What do you like about high school physical education?

Why?

3. What do you dislike about high school physical education?

Why?

4. Write down the physical education activities that you like the best.

Why do you like these activities?

5. Are the activities that you like the best offered in your physical education class?

If so, which ones?

6. Which activities do you dislike participating in physical education?

Why do you dislike these activities?

7. Rank the following activities with 1 being what you like best and 11 being what you like least.

_____ Aerobics	_____ Tennis
_____ Basketball	_____ Soccer
_____ Baseball/Softball	_____ Swimming
_____ Football	_____ Walking
_____ Golf	_____ Weight Training
_____ Jogging	_____ (other)

8. Do you think they are physical activities that should be offered for just male students?

Why?

9. Do you think there are physical activities that should be offered for just female students?

Why?

10. Do you prefer to participate in coed or all female physical education classes?

Why?

11. Do you enjoy outdoor physical activities? If so, which ones?

Why?

12. Should physical fitness tests be a part of physical education class?

Why or why not?

13. Write down ways to make more female students' participate in physical education class?

14. Write down magazines that you like to read.

Why do you read these magazines?

15. Write down the TV shows that you like to watch.

Why do you watch these shows?

16. Do you like to watch sporting events on TV?

If so, which ones?

17. Write down Internet sites that you like to visit.

Why do you visit these Internet sites?

18. Are you on an athletic team with the High School? If so, which one(s)?

19. Are on an athletic team outside of school? If so, which one(s)?

How long have you played the sport(s)?

20. Write down two more things about high school physical education that you have not written down.