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LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT FEMALES ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

DISSEPTION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Kimberly A. Bush, B.A., M.S., M.A.

* * * *

The Ohio State University
2002

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ABSTRACT

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention denoted that engagement in physical activity is beneficial for all, thus, practitioners of physical activity and physical education have dedicated recent years to encouraging youth to live active lifestyles (CDC, 1997). Fifty-eight percent of Caucasian adolescent females report engagement in vigorous physical activity three days a week compared with 50% of Hispanic and only 41% of African American females (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1999).

Sports curriculum in the United States is male dominated (Chepyator-Thomson, & Ennis, 1997). Thus, achieving gender equity in physical education classes can be challenging (Griffin, 1989b). In particular, some feminists have recently criticized models of physical education programs. Nilges (2000) stated that physical education curricula, which are structured primarily to focus on team sports, are likely to promote a traditional male model of movement. Nilges (1998) called for physical educators to challenge gender equitable teaching beyond the liberal definition of Title IX and more towards a feminist pedagogy.
This qualitative study looked at physical activity in the lives of four African American adolescent females. Critical cultural feminism was employed as the theoretical framework. Critical cultural feminism views power as being distributed inequitably throughout society particularly through the lines of gender, race, and class (Birrell, 2000).

Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed individually and across cases. Positive perceptions of physical activity included benefiting one's health. Negative perceptions included lack of structure, hindering social interaction, confidence deflation, and enervating. Family, friends, church, school and media were sources they drew upon. Physical activity functioned as a physical education requirement, social function, means of fulfilling gender roles, meeting desired appearances, increasing discipline, means of transportation, and exploration of interests.

The findings indicated a need to organize family oriented physical activity programs, a need for nontraditional and more specific education on physical activity, health, and safe ways to achieve a healthy lifestyle; and a need to utilize the church setting and other community settings in the African American community as a means of providing education and opportunity with regard to physical activity.
Dedicated to Octavia, Sam, Sara, and Tynesha

And in Memory of Nanny and Pop;

And Starbuck

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PUBLICATIONS


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Major Field: Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) denoted that engagement in physical activity is beneficial for all, regardless of age; thus the practitioners of physical activity, physical education and sport have dedicated recent years to encouraging youth to live active lifestyles (CDC, 1997). Physical activity is a risk factor for chronic diseases including: type II diabetes, heart disease and particular cancers (McGinnis & Foege, 1993). Although many of the aforementioned diseases manifest during adulthood, it is recognized that one of the major risk factors for chronic disease (i.e. physical activity) finds its origin during early childhood. Several studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1997) found that physical activity affects the body in such ways as: improving strength and endurance, building muscles, and controlling weight (Zakarian, Hovell, Hofstetter, Sallis, & Keating, 1994). In addition to the physical benefits of physical activity and participation in sport and physical education, there are psychosocial benefits as well. These include reducing anxiety and stress, and increasing self-esteem (CDC, 1997).
Corbin and Pangrazi (1999) have recognized that the adolescent years are a pivotal period for the promotion of physical activity and the development of physical activity patterns that can be maintained in future years.

Baranowski, Bouchard, Bar-Or, Bricker, Heath, Kimm, et al. (1992) and Sallis (1994) have conducted reviews regarding physical activity in youth and the benefits of activity including the positive influence on: aerobic fitness, blood lipids, blood pressure, body composition, glucose, insulin, skeletal health, and injuries, as well as on psychological variables. Despite the many benefits of physical activity for young people, evidence demonstrates that the amount of time an individual spends in physical activity decreases with age (Rowland, 1990).

Adolescent Physical Activity Levels

Some youth do not experience the benefits of physical activity and remain inactive. Blair, Clark, Cureton, and Powell (1989) found that although young people are the most active segment of the United States population, there still exists a large portion of youth who are not active. Rowland (1990) noted the inverse affect of age on physical activity with levels of physical activity decreasing as age increases. Only 50% of young people, aged 12 – 21 years in the United States regularly participate in vigorous physical activity, and 25% report no vigorous physical activity between the ages of 6 – 16, though males are more physically active than females outside the school setting (Zakarian et al., 1994). In addition, “the percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years” (CDC, 1997, p. 1). Data from the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) demonstrated that engagement in vigorous physical activity on at least three days of the previous seven
days declined from 9th grade to 12th grade among both females and males. Data are inconsistent with the assumption that physical activity habits of youth and adolescents continue into adulthood (Livingstone, 1994; Malina, 1996). In fact, levels of physical activity in adolescents do not track into adulthood, whereas levels of inactivity in adolescents do track into adulthood. There is some evidence that youth with above average ability in sport at the age of 13, and described as “extremely energetic” at 15, are more likely to engage in physical activity at 36 years of age (Kuh & Cooper, 1992).

Adolescents, Gender and Physical Activity Levels

There have been consistent findings on youth and their involvement in physical activity. Rowland (1990) reported that between the ages of 6 and 16 there is a 50% decline in physical activity for youth. Although there are declines in physical activity participation among both males and females between the 9th and 12th grades, this decline is more apparent in females. Sallis (1993) found that boys are approximately 15% to 25% more physically active than girls. Furthermore, during the school-age years, activity levels decrease at a rate of about 2.7% per year for boys and 7.4% per year for girls (Sallis, 1993). The majority of physical activity in youth is outside of the school setting (Pate, Long, & Heath, 1994). Most adolescents spend more than 3 hours per week outside of school in leisure-time activities (Pate et al., 1994). The top five activities for boys include: bicycling, basketball, football, baseball or softball, and swimming. The top five physical activities for girls include: swimming, bicycling, dancing, rollerskating, and walking (Pate et al., 1994). Simons-Morton, Taylor, Snider, Huang, & Fulton (1994) reported that elementary school
students spend less than 10% of physical education class time engaging in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, and that middle school students spend less than 17% of their time in physical education class in this degree of activity. Sallis (1993) noted that males are more physically active than females and that this discrepancy increases with age. Data collected by Sallis, Simons-Morton, Stone, Corbin, Epstein, Faucette, et al. (1992) indicated that both male and female adolescents from families with low socioeconomic status are more inactive than male and female adolescents from wealthier families. The correlation between poverty and increased levels of inactivity in youth continues into adulthood. On average 25% of all adult Americans fail to engage in any physical activity. Yet, this percentage climbs as high as 43% in some low-income groups (Taylor, Baranowski, & Young, 1998).

Adolescents, Ethnicity and Physical Activity Levels

Several studies have investigated ethnic differences in youth activity levels. The results have been mixed. Robinson and Killen (1995) conducted a large survey of ninth-grade boys and girls. The findings indicated that African Americans reported being more physically active and watching more television than other ethnic groups (i.e., Pacific Islanders, Asians, Hispanics or Latinos and Whites). Zakarian et al. (1994) studied ninth and eleventh grade students and noted that when levels of vigorous physical activity were compared, minority adolescents did not differ greatly from their White counterparts. However, other studies have reported that ethnic minorities, particularly African American females, are less physically active than other ethnicities. Wolf, Gortmaker, Cheung, Gray, Herzog, and Colditz (1993) studied African American females from fifth through twelfth grades, and found that

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almost 50% of the girls watched five or more hours of television per day, compared with more than 25% of Asian American females and 20% of White and Hispanic girls. Heath, Pratt, Warren, and Kann (1994) conducted a national study of American high school students and found that African American students were significantly less likely (28.8%) to be vigorously active than were their White (39.3%) or Hispanic (34.5%) students. The same study revealed that African American females were the least active of all subgroups, with 38.0% classified as sedentary. Heath et al. (1994) also noted that the low levels of physical activity found in women and African Americans were evident by the ninth grade. Fifty-eight percent of Caucasian adolescent females report engagement in vigorous physical activity three days a week compared with 50% of Hispanic and only 41% of young African American females (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1999). Additionally, many African American adolescents living in the Midwest are not meeting the recommended amounts of physical activity (Pate, 1994; YRBS, 1999).

The conflicting information from the above studies indicates that a clear and consistent pattern of youth physical activity levels and ethnic differences has yet to be established. There could be several explanations for these discrepancies including: types of questions posed, intensity of the activity, regional differences, economic factors, age differences, activity preferences and types of activities (Taylor, Beech, & Cummings, 1997). As noted by Gottlieb and Chen (1985), activity preferences can also vary across age, gender, and ethnic groups.

Physical activity provides health benefits later in life by decreasing the risk of chronic disease. Physical inactivity in adolescence is tied to chronic disease in
adulthood and a large portion of adolescents is not active placing them at risk for future health problems. Females are more at risk than males, the poor are more at risk than the rich, and African American adolescents are more at risk than Caucasian adolescents. There is a clear need for physical activity intervention, especially in indigent African American female populations.

There have been several suggestions as to why declines in physical activity levels are so prevalent during the adolescent years. These include: decreased opportunities for participation in organized sport, increased access to automobiles, and social demands (ie. social acceptance and attractiveness) (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1999). In addition, the adolescent years are a time when most young people start to make sense of who they are within the larger society in which they co-exist. Thus, identity development during adolescence is of great importance and may contribute to the development of new interests with less concern for sport and physical activity. Melnyk and Weinstein (1994) suggested that perhaps lack of access to exercise facilities, culturally based attitudes toward exercise, and preference for social versus individual exercise programs, are reasons for low physical activity among African American women, and not simply a lack of motivation.

National Efforts for Change

Prior to 1994 many of the guidelines for youth physical activity were based on studies of adults. In June of 1994 the International Consensus Conference on Physical Activity Guidelines for Adolescents convened to develop physical activity guidelines specifically for adolescents based on a review of literature concerning the effects of physical activity on this population (Sallis, 1994). The participants of the conference,
experts from governmental, medical, and scientific organizations, produced two guidelines for adolescent physical activity:

1. All adolescents should be physically active daily, or nearly every day, as part of play, games, sports, work, transportation, recreation, physical education, or planned exercise, in the context of family, school, and community activities.

2. Adolescents should engage in three or more sessions per week of activities that last 20 minutes or more at a time and that require moderate to vigorous levels of exertion. (Sallis, 1994)

Since the establishment of these guidelines, efforts to promote physical activity among adolescents have increased nationwide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1997) established guidelines for school and community programs to promote lifelong physical activities among young people. In addition, the United States Department of Health and Human Services has issued two reports on the nation’s health. The latest report, Healthy People 2010, established objectives for physical activity among children and adolescents. The objectives are:

- To increase the proportion of adolescents who engage in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more of the previous 7 days. The goal is to increase the percent (27%) of students in grades 9 through 12 who engaged in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more of the previous days to 35%.

- To increase the proportion of adolescents who engage in vigorous physical activity that promotes cardiorespiratory fitness 3 or more days
per week for 20 or more minutes per occasion. The suggested increase is 20% (from 65% to 85%).

- To increase the proportion of the nation's public and private schools which require daily physical education for all students. The goal is a 47% improvement for middle and junior high schools, and a 150% improvement for high schools.

- To increase the proportion of adolescents who participate in daily school physical education from 29% to 50%.

- To increase the proportion of adolescents who spend at least 50 percent of school physical education class time being physically active from 38% to 50%

- To increase the proportion of adolescents who view television 2 or fewer hours on a school day from 57% to 75% (USDHHS, 1996).

However, the report does not address how we may accomplish these goals or how gender and ethnicity might influence our choice of strategies.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (1997) has outlined ten strategies to promote health through lifelong participation in enjoyable and safe physical activity and sports. These guidelines address the following: policy, environment, physical education curricula and instruction, extracurricular activities, family involvement, training, Health Services, community programs, and evaluation. Unfortunately, these strategies are silent on issues of gender and ethnicity.

Feminist Concerns

A recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is to increase the participation of adolescents in physical activity (CDC, 1997). Various
settings are being targeted for physical activity promotion, but one particular environment is that of the school (CDC, 1997). Despite the efforts to promote physical activity in the gymnasium, there are also those who are more skeptical of achieving the Healthy People 2010 objectives if our physical education programs remain as they are. Some feminists have recently criticized current models of physical education programs. For instance, Nilges (2000) stated that physical education curricula, which are structured to focus primarily on team sports, are likely to promote “a” traditional male model of movement (Nilges, 2000). She argued that this male model of movement is one that includes characteristics such as aggressiveness, speed, power and strength. Meanwhile, some researchers believe the problems in physical education go beyond the choice of content and relate to gender biases in how we evaluate students. For example, Smeal, Carpenter, and Tait (1994) argued that characteristics such as aggression, speed, power, strength, and competitiveness are typically male dominated and are overemphasized in the content of physical education programs. There has been a call for physical educators to challenge gender-equitable teaching beyond the liberal definition of Title IX and more toward a feminist pedagogy (Nilges, 1998). A feminist pedagogy would work to create an equitable environment for all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc. One method of doing so as suggested by Williamson (1993) is to take sex-stereotyped sports, such as baseball, football, and basketball, out of physical education curricula and build non-competitive environments into the gymnasium.

There is also a need to conduct physical activity interventions with African American females, as they constitute the least active segment of America’s adolescent
population (Heath et al., 1994). Empirical evidence that the development and implementation of interventions for this population is limited. Feminist suggestions that traditional, male-defined models of physical education do not meet the needs of African American females imply a need to develop innovative and new approaches to promoting physical activity in this population (Taylor et al., 1997). More studies must be conducted which focus on ascertaining the needs and interests of African American female adolescents and their perspectives on physical activity.

This study assumes a feminist vantage point. Feminist research is distinguished from other traditions because of its “deliberate focus on gender combined with an emphasis on emancipatory goals” (Kirsch, 1999, p. 7). The specific feminist lens for this study will be that of a critical cultural feminist. The underlying beliefs about critical studies are “about power and how gender relations are reproduced by, resisted in, and transformed through sport” (Birrell, 2000, p. 67). Cultural studies has a basic assumption that “power is distributed inequitably throughout society, often along lines of gender, class, and race” (Birrell, 2000, p. 67). The inequitable distribution of power within society has a ripple effect into all sectors of society, including that of sport. A lack of power and a lack of voice often go hand in hand and are related to one another. Until all segments of society have equal voice, power will not be equitably distributed. This study aims to give voice to adolescent African American girls, a group often powerless, voiceless, and thus neglected in our society.
Statement of the Problem

Low levels of physical activity among adolescent African American girls is of national concern. Reasons for these low levels of physical activity include:

Current offerings for physical education in schools, sports programs, and recreation programs in communities: Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis (1997) noted that the sports curriculum in the United States is male dominated. In addition, many physical education programs, sport programs and recreation programs do not appear to cater to the changing interests of adolescents. Williamson (1993) suggested that we remove sex-stereotyped sports (baseball, basketball, football) from physical education curricula. Chepyator-Thomson, You, & Hardin (2000) suggested that it is of great importance that we, as physical educators develop curricular programs that are responsive to female’s interests. Hutchinson (1995) and Williamson (1993) recommended outdoor education as one such program.

Exclusionary practices of school sport. Many of our school sports teams do not allow for all people interested to play. Limitations due to school finances often lead to schools not having opportunities and spots for all interested athletes. Also, due to the higher levels of competition on school sports teams, even once on the team individuals may not get sufficient playing time and may become discouraged enough to quit (Murphy, 2000).

Lack of interest in pursuing a physically active lifestyle. As youth hit their adolescent years their interests often change and, for many the role of pursuing a physically active lifestyle seems to be of less importance. Corbin and Pangrazi (1999) suggested reasons for the dramatic decrease in participation during the adolescent
years including; decreased opportunities for participation in organized sport, increased social demands, and increased access to automobiles. In addition, Melnyk and Weinstein (1994) suggested that perhaps lack of access to exercise facilities, culturally based attitudes toward exercise, and preference for social versus individual exercise programs, are reasons for low physical activity among African American women, and not simply a lack of motivation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the involvement of past and present physical activity in the lives of four African American females, their perceptions of physical activity, the role physical activity plays in their lives, and the sources these four African American females draw upon for their beliefs about physical activity. It is hoped that a better understanding of the experiences, perceptions, roles and sources for these African American adolescent females will lead to a better understanding of optimal physical activity program opportunities for these adolescents.

Research Questions

The specific questions that guided my research are as follows:

R.Q.1. What is the nature and scope of involvement in physical activity for these four African American adolescent females (co-researchers)?

R.Q.2. What are the perceptions (positive, negative, or neutral) with regard to physical activity for the co-researchers?

R.Q.3. Who or what are the sources the co-researchers draw upon to describe their beliefs about physical activity?
R.Q.4. How does physical activity function in the lives of the co-researchers?

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

Several boundaries were placed on this study. Some were decisions made by the researcher (delimitations) and others were beyond the control of the researcher (limitations).

Delimitations

There were three delimitations for the study:

First, the co-researchers for this study were chosen from a church located in the Midwest. The co-researchers, ages 15-18, were selected by the Youth Minister of the church. Their views are not meant to be a true representation of the values, experiences, views, and desires (with regard to what one would want in a physical activity program) of other African American females at this church, of other African American females at other churches, or of other African American adolescent females in general.

Second, the duration of data collection for the study was ten weeks. The study began in mid-January and continued through the months of February, March and early April. The researcher had spent many months getting to know the females prior to the actual data collection, the actual time spent per week (ranging from two hours per week to six hours per week). Interacting with and observing the females for the purposes of data collection limited the quality of the relationships that were formed.

Third, the fact that the data were collected during the winter, as opposed to the summer, may have had an effect on the levels of physical activity that were observed, as well as the views and attitudes of the girls. Sallis et al. (1992) have documented...
that seasonal effects influence levels of physical activity participation and choices of activities.

Limitations

There were four major limitations to this study. First, it was necessary for the researcher to develop a rapport with the co-researchers in order to help encourage them to share, in an honest manner, their experiences with and perceptions of physical activity. Perhaps this rapport influenced the interactions between the researcher and the co-researchers. Thus, the development of research/participant rapport can be viewed as both a limitation and an asset.

Second, the degree to which the co-researchers were honest cannot be assessed and therefore is a limitation of this study. Efforts were made to get to know the co-researchers in all aspects of their lives before and during data collection. In addition, a variety of data collection methods were used to help gain honest representations of the co-researchers experiences and perceptions. The researcher developed a good rapport with the co-researchers so that they felt comfortable reporting their own experiences and beliefs about physical activity and not what they believed the researcher wanted to hear. It is assumed that everything the students reported about physical activity was an honest representation of their personal beliefs unless the triangulation of data suggested otherwise.

A third limitation to this study was the choice of the activities/tasks that I as a researcher participated in with the students. The researcher chose particular activities to encourage the youth to share their experiences and perceptions of physical activity.
The types of activities chosen may have affected the level to which the co-researchers were willing to reveal their experiences.

A fourth limitation to this study is that I am a white researcher attempting to learn about what influences physical activity in the lives of the four African American females. I am not part of a minority ethnic group. Though I am committed to understanding these four African American adolescent females, I recognize that the personal experiences I draw upon to formulate my views on physical activity are different than those of my co-researchers. I am limited in my capacity to fully understand and empathize with the perceptions of people belonging to a different ethnic background, or the factors within another culture that influence its members.

**Definition of Terms**

**Physical Activity:** Consists of athletic, recreational or occupational activities that require physical skills. Physical activity utilizes strength, speed, power, endurance, flexibility, range of motion or agility. Physical activity is used as an umbrella term in this study to include all formal and informal activities including those in the physical education and sport realms.

**Adolescence:** Adolescence is characterized by “rapid physical, biochemical, social, and emotional changes and involves approximately six years, or approximately one-third, of a youngster’s growing period” (Payne & Isaacs, 1999). For the purposes of this study, the term adolescence refers to high school aged students (ages 14 – 18).

**Critical Cultural Feminism:** The terms critical cultural feminism and critical feminism are used interchangeably in this study. Critical cultural feminists
view power as being distributed inequitably in society, particularly through race, class, and gender (Birrell, 2000). Critical cultural feminists within the sporting realm look at how gender relations are reproduced by, resisted in, and transformed through sport (Birrell, 2000).

Co-Researchers: The term co-researchers will be used in place of what is traditionally referred to as participants. This was a decision that I made as a feminist researcher in realizing that those whom I interviewed and observed to conduct this study were much more than mere participants, for they made this entire study possible.

Informants: The term informants refers to the parents/guardians any of the co-researchers, the co-researchers’ Youth Pastor, and their teachers. I deliberately chose this term to highlight how these persons helped inform me about the lives and beliefs of my co-researchers. These individuals helped to inform the study and provide a better understanding of the participants.

God-sister: The term god-sister is used throughout chapter four by the co-researchers. I felt it necessary to define how the co-researchers define the term god-sister. The co-researchers referred to their godmother, who generally is their mother’s best friend. Their godmother’s children are those whom are the god-sisters/god-brothers of the co-researchers. Although they are not related as sisters by blood, the relationship is a very close, emotional one in most cases.

Significance of the Study

Only 50% of young people in the United States ages 12-21 regularly participate in vigorous physical activity and one-quarter report no vigorous physical activity.
activity between the ages of 6 – 16. Research indicates that males are more physically active outside of the school setting than females during these years (Zakarian et. al., 1994). The discrepancy between male and female adolescent physical activity increases with age. Several studies have investigated ethnic differences in youth activity levels. Although the findings have been mixed, several studies have reported that ethnic minorities, particularly African American females, are less physically active than other ethnicities. Heath et al. (1994) found that African American females were the least active of all subgroups, with 38% classifying as sedentary. Heath et al. (1994) also reported that low levels of physical activity for African Americans were evident by the ninth grade. In addition, Sallis et al. (1992) noted that both males and females from families with low socioeconomic status are more inactive than their male and female counterparts from wealthier families. These data suggest it is necessary for educators, leaders, and designers of physical activity programs to help develop physical activity programs that encourage more youth to be physically active. It is especially important to develop programs capable of differentiating between and equally encourage the interests and needs of adolescent females. The possible health risks associated with inactivity demand a change in the way schools and community organizations view the effectiveness of current physical education and recreation programs.

This study will help provide an understanding of the experiences with and perceptions of five African American female adolescents toward physical activity. The results from this study cannot be generalized to apply to all African American adolescent females, but perhaps the information gained from this study may help
physical educators and those designing physical activity programs in choosing activities that better meet the needs for African American adolescent females than the traditional ones frequently offered. It is hoped that this will engage more adolescent African American females in physical activity, and encourage them to take more ownership and leadership roles in their physical activity environments.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a review of literature and information that has assisted the researcher in developing the theoretical framework of this study. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will provide the reader with an overview of gender and education. The second section is an overview of the literature on adolescent years for females. The third section is an overview of the literature on physical activity in the United States, with a particular focus on the adolescent population. The fourth section is an overview of the literature on African American adolescents and racial identity.

Gender Research in Education

This section explores past and current research on gender issues in education. It provides a background of information relating to the manifestation of gender appropriate behavior by males and females in an educational setting. Children often receive messages at an early age as to what is gender appropriate through such things as toys. Females are often associated with homely duties (vacuuming, looking after dolls, and cooking) while boys are typically identified with trucks, sports, and

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guns (Haywood, 1986; Streitmatter, 1994). People are often socialized into believing in and living out these stereotypes. King, Miles, and Kniska (1991) noted that the labels we associate with gender roles often become self-fulfilling prophecies for those being stereotyped and for the catalysts of the stereotyping.

The idea of "gender appropriate" behavior in society can be reinforced in schools (Williamson, 1996). Adler, Kless, and Adler (1992) conducted a study with elementary school children and found that children in peer groups constructed idealized images of masculinity and femininity. A girl's popularity was at least in part due to her physical appearance, parent's socioeconomic status, academic success, and social skills. A boy's popularity was based on his toughness, athletic ability, coolness, success in cross-gender relationships, and social skills. In addition students often identify with content areas they feel are gender appropriate by the end of elementary school. Streitmatter (1994) noted that girls, boys and teachers considered math, science and computers masculine activities while reading was associated with femininity. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) (1992) found that although boys' and girls' achievement in math is declining, girls in high school are less likely than boys to take advanced courses and be in the top math groups.

There are various educational sources that can present information to reinforce gender stereotypes of "appropriate roles" for boys and girls in schools. Examples of these are: bulletin boards, textbooks, and school plays. The AAUW (1992) found that gender and race biased textbooks are still prevalent in schools. Teachers, too, can play a role in reinforcing stereotypical beliefs. In a study by the AAUW (1992) it was reported that teachers favored and encouraged boys by giving
them more praise, constructive feedback, and opportunities to respond to questions. Race and socioeconomic status have also been found to be factors that affect how boys and girls are treated by teachers (Parish, Eubanks, Aquila, & Walker, 1989; Sutton, 1991). Grant (1984) noted that teacher interactions which negatively differentiate between ethnicities could lead to African American girls perceiving themselves as being suited for stereotypical roles such as maids, nannies, and housekeepers. Grossman and Grossman (1994) conducted a study on European American teachers and found that they treated African American and European American girls differently. The African American girls were praised for their social skills rather than their academic achievement, and were dealt with more harshly when they misbehaved. Nilges (1998) noted there has been little if any attention to reforms in gender and education.

Gender Research in Physical Education

This section addresses past and current research on gender issues in physical education. It provides an overview of the barriers to achieving gender equity in this field and suggests changes that not only aim to attain equity, but also inspire the subject of research in this study. Sports curriculum in the United States is male dominated (Chepyator-Thomson, & Ennis, 1997). Thus, achieving gender equity in physical education classes can be challenging (Griffin, 1989b; Grossman & Grossman, 1994). Dewar (1987) noted that physical education is an additional arena in which the construction of gender can be maintained and perpetuated.
Coeducational Physical Education

Title IX was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1972 and specifically stated:

"No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid" (20 U.S.C. §1681a, 1988). The purpose of Title IX was to insure that girls and boys received the same educational opportunities. Title IX applies to all educational institutions receiving federal support. The passage of Title IX led to the initiation of research agendas, the creation of gender equitable pedagogy, the development of curricular programs, and the development of environments suitable for these needs of both males and females in educational settings (Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000).

Most physical education classes were segregated on the basis of sex prior to Title IX. The rationale for Title IX was to offer boys and girls equal opportunity in physical education classes for both instruction and practice (Griffin, 1984). However, since the passage of Title IX physical education classes have been offered on a coeducational basis. The exceptions to the coeducational mandate in physical education are for activities that involve bodily contact (i.e. wrestling, rugby, football, basketball, ice hockey, boxing). Sports involving no such contact (i.e. track and field, tennis, and volleyball) must be coeducational. Additionally, students may be grouped according to ability for instructional purposes if the objective standards of individual performance are applied without regard to sex and do not adversely effect members of a gender group. In these cases, it is possible that classes could be entirely comprised of one sex. Finally, students whose religion prohibits them from engaging in
coeducational activities may be excluded from these classes and offered sex-segregated physical education (34CFR106.34).

Unfortunately, despite the positive intent of Title IX, researchers have found differential participation patterns for boys and girls in coeducation environments compared to single-sex classes. Reasons cited by physical educators for this decline include: sports and games are geared more toward boy’s interests. Since physical education became coeducational, girls have been overly concerned about how they are perceived by boys, and the physical, social and emotional challenges of puberty are too overpowering in a coeducational setting to provide an optimal learning environment (Lynn, 1999). Griffin (1984a) found that the majority of middle school girls exhibited one of four nonassertive behaviors during physical education lessons: giving up, giving away, hanging back, and acquiescing. Lirgg (1993) conducted a study comparing both class formats and found that over a 10-week basketball unit, boys’ self-confidence increased in a coeducational environment. However, the self-confidence of girls decreased in the coeducational environment and increased their confidence in the single-sex class. Boys can benefit more than girls in coeducational classes (Lirgg, 1993).

A massive shift occurred in the profession of physical education in the 1960’s and 1970’s, merging what were once separate classes into co-education physical education classes. Vertinsky (1992) noted that this shift has led to the use of a traditionally male model of physical education. Vertinsky (1992) has argued that once we combined our physical education classes to include both boys and girls, that we naturally adopted a male model of physical education. Coed programs “implied that
male standards would be the ones to emulate, reifying the values of competitive sport and further reinforcing masculine hegemony” (Vertinsky, 1992, p. 378). Curricular initiatives have attempted to provide gender inclusive physical education, however, the traditional, male-based, multi-activity curriculum is still dominant (Lawson, 1998). Despite the model used in physical education it is imperative that students are held accountable in the gymnasium (Lund, 1992).

Treanor, Graber, Housner and Wiegand (1998) found that in a study of 466 middle school students 60% of the boys and 67% of the girls preferred single sex to coeducation physical education classes. The single-sex classes afforded benefits to both boys and girls including: greater opportunities to practice, better skill and team sports performance, and less fear with regard to getting injured. Girls did perceive that they competed harder in the coed classes. Treanor et al. (1998) found that boys liked physical education significantly more than girls. Girls exhibited a gradual decline in liking for physical education from 6th to 8th grade. Treanor et al. (1998) suggested that it is critical that those administering coeducational physical education be aware of the challenges that lie ahead of them.

Nilges (1998) studied a fourth grade physical education class over a 14-week period and found the physical education environment filled with “patriarchal ideologies and patterns of gender differentiation” (p. 189). Boys in this environment were depicted as the privileged members of the class. Nilges (1998) called for physical educators to challenge gender-equitable teaching beyond the liberal definition of Title IX and more towards a feminist pedagogy. Physical educators should challenge the traditional norms of feminine and masculine movements and
promote an atmosphere where students can openly explore and understand all
movement patterns (Nilges, 2000).

Cheypator-Thomson, You, Hardin (2000) conducted a study to determine how
gender has been studied in physical education. The goal of the paper was to analyze
the “extent to which the concept of gender has been addressed in mainstream United
States-based (US-based) journals in physical education” (p. 99). Liberal feminist
theory guided the research study. Five research, practice-based and theory journals in
the field of physical education were selected for the study: *Journal of Teaching in
Physical Education, Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, Physical
Educator, Quest, and Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*. Two thousand and
twenty articles were reviewed from 1992-1997, and 93 (4.11%) were found to focus
on issues and perspectives related to gender. Findings revealed three major themes:
participation-based, program-centered, and workplace-connected. Information from
this review is introduced throughout the remainder of this section.

Camoy and Levin (1985) noted that society’s gender, social class and race
issues, as well as the conflicts that arise from them, are often reflected through the
public education system. Grant (1984) stated that larger society and the public
education system are interrelated and, as noted by Cheypator-Thomson, You, Hardin
(2000), “students bring their ascribed characteristics (for example, gender) and
actualize them in the gymnasium environment” (p. 100). Gender has been understood
to mean socio-cultural differences between men and women (Cheypator-Thomson, &
Ennis, 1997).
Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin (2000) noted that the "development of curricular programs responsive to female's interests is of great importance in physical education" (p. 104). Teachers must provide a variety of curricular programs to meet the needs of females. Several researchers have suggested that sex-stereotyped sports such as baseball, football, and basketball, be taken out of physical education curricula because they reflect mostly male interests (Hoppes, 1987; Lirgg & Feltz, 1989; Stewart & Corbin, 1988; Williamson, 1993). Griffin (1984a) urges that, should teachers utilize these sports in their classes, they do so by building non-competitive environments. It has also been suggested that non-traditional programs be developed to promote gender equity (Bond, 1994; Browne, 1992; Crawford, 1994; Ferdun, 1994; Griffin, 1984a; Humberstone, 1995; Knoppers, 1988; Lirgg & Feltz, 1989; Luke & Sinclair, 1991; and Williamson, 1993). Outdoor adventure programming is one of the suggested curricula or developing new activities that would allow students to have more equitable experiences (Hutchinson, 1995; Williamson, 1993). Long-term leisure sports have been suggested as being appropriate for females because these activities allow the participants to develop positive attitudes toward physical activities in their daily lives (Williamson, 1993).

Teachers provide sex-stereotyped programs for students (Hutchinson, 1995; Knoppers, 1988; and Macdonald, 1990). Curriculum and instruction in physical education have been influenced by three kinds of sports that have traditionally existed in schools and societies; male-dominated sports, female-dominated sports, and same sex sports (Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000). Limited physical activities including gymnastics, dance, and calisthenics, were offered to females before the
1950's (Hutchinson, 1995). Hutchinson has (1995) noted since then that many
individual and team sports have been added, but highly competitive sports are
generally perceived to be undesirable and inappropriate for females
(Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000). In addition, in the gymnasium females
are found to require different learning experiences (Cheypator-Thomson, You, &
Hardin, 2000).

Instruction

Hutchinson (1995) and Williamson (1993) found that teachers typically group
students based on gender, as opposed to grouping by skill level or ability. These
circumstances often lead to unequal participation opportunities (Cheypator-Thomson,
You, & Hardin, 2000). This in turn influences the motivation of the students.

Construction of gender-equity based experiences

Several instructional strategies are recognized as positive influences on a
female's active participation in physical education classes including: the creation of
comfortable learning environments (Browne, 1992; Humberstone, 1995; Lirgg, 1992;
McBride, 1990), student-centered teaching (Garcia, 1994; Griffin, 1984a;
Humberstone, 1995; Luck & Sinclair, 1991; Williamson, 1993), use of inclusive
language (Hutchinson, 1995; Knoppers, 1988; Lirgg, 1992; Stewart & Corbin, 1988;
Williamson, 1993), and utilization of precise and equal feedback patterns (Dunbar &

Griffin (1984b) identified six styles of female participation in physical
education lessons: athlete is highly skilled and involved; JV player is of average skill
and involved, cheerleaders are involved in activities, lost souls are not involved and
invisible, female fatales act as if PE is a waste of time, and the system beaters are adept at finding legal ways to avoid participating.

Female Self-confidence in Sport

Participant’s choice of activity, the amount of effort they put forth in that activity, and persistence in an activity determines self-confidence in athletic performance (Lirgg, 1992). Individuals who perceive they are good at a particular skill will choose to be active and persistent in that activity (Lirgg, 1992). Individuals who predict that they will perform poorly will either choose a less demanding task or refuse to be involved in that activity, or become discouraged and quit (Lirgg, 1992). Self-confidence in athletic achievement is lower in females than in males (Lirgg, 1992).

Suggestions for enhancing self-confidence in sport for girls include: creating opportunities for success in girls’ physical education classes, providing positive feedback to females, supplying models of female who have been successful in sport and physical activity environments, and developing intervention programs and retraining physical educator’s (Lirgg, 1992; Greendorfer, 1983; Stewart & Corbin, 1989). Even in required physical education classes, females in our schools have been lead to believe that their participation in physical activities is optional in and out of the school setting (Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000). Cheypator-Thomson & Ennis (1997) suggest that the concept of gender be understood from cultural and perpesctives. AAHPERD (1995) noted “gender is the social construction of gender roles. It is the socialization of people to gender appropriate behavior reinforced by interactions with family, friends, peers, the school system, the community, and the
political and economical systems” (p. 3). It is necessary for educators to recognize how males and females have been educated in school and society and then understand the reasons for gender differences (Thomas & Thomas, 1988).

Research is lacking with regard to gender and physical education. However, many physical educators believe that participation rates for girls are higher when classes are single-sex (Griffin, 1985; Lynn, 1999). There has been a lack of research in the area of coeducation physical education and there are many variables involved, making it difficult to explain the differential participation rates for boys and girls. Teachers should set high standards for all students to avoid creating inequity (Luke & Sinclair, 1991). Classroom environments must create equitable learning environments (Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000). We have not paid enough attention to the inclusion of the different ethnic groups that are in our schools. There is a silence in pedagogical research on these issues. The role of class, and race must also be part of our dialogues that shape practices of physical education and physical activity. Kenway and Modra (1992) suggested that feminist scholars seek to deconstruct and understand the fact that women have not received equal benefits in society as their male counterparts.

Adolescence and Females

It is important that if we are to study adolescent females that we are familiar with what is occurring physically and psychologically during this period in their lives. A variety of changes are occurring to the adolescent female, and as researchers, we should be familiar some of these alterations. Female adolescence can be viewed as a
fast-paced roller coaster ride, or as a period of destruction that requires attention in order to avoid disaster.

As noted by Pipher (1994):

Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle. In early adolescence, studies show that girls’ IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and “tomboyish” personalites and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed. They report great unhappiness with their own bodies (p. 19).

Covey and Feltz (1991) stated that adolescence for some females is a time that is characterized by a period of “unhappiness and emotional distress” (p. 464). In particular, adolescent females describe themselves as “more sad, lonely and vulnerable than adolescent males, as well as having more crying spells and temper outbursts” (Covey & Feltz, 1991, p. 464). They feel more shame and less satisfaction about their bodies than do male adolescents. There are many things happening internally during adolescence and much of this is not communicated to the surface (Pipher, 1994). Adolescent girls experience a conflict between their “autonomous selves and their need to be feminine, between their status as human beings and their vocation as females” (Pipher, 1994, pp. 21 – 22). Despite all that is occurring during
adolescence, until "recently, adolescent girls haven't been studied by academics, and they have long baffled therapists" (Pipher, 1994).

Jaffee and Lutter (1995) conducted a study that focused on factors associated with negative or positive body image in adolescent females. Examples include weight, physical activity, teasing, comparison to others and racial identity. One hundred and fifty-two girls who participated at YWCA summer programs across the United States completed an eight-page questionnaire. Findings indicated that low body image of adolescent females was often associated with factors concerned with weight. In addition, it was found that Black girls were more likely to consider themselves attractive, to like the way they looked, and to feel their bodies were competent and capable, than their Caucasian sisters.

In addition, Abrams, Allen and Gray (1993) reported the prevalence of eating disorders among European American adolescent females in the US was 3.26 in 100,000, while only .42 in 100,000 among minority adolescent females reported eating disorders. This discrepancy has been attributed to the lack of acculturation of mainstream values on the part of African American females and to underreporting by African American victims and/or their parents teacher etc. Underreporting could be due to unequal access to health care (Dolan, 1991). Forty-five percent of African American adolescent females were referred for treatment for eating disorders from the emergency room whereas only 4% of White adolescent females were referred from the same setting, suggesting that minority females were more likely than other adolescent females to receive treatment for eating disorders at a more advanced stage in an emergency setting.
As children become young adults, they are challenged by and forced to deal with changes in their social, emotional, physical and biological selves. This is a time period when mixed messages and multiple expectations are placed on young people by parents, coaches, teachers and friends (Goldberg & Chandler, 1989). It is a time when physical differences between males and females are greatest. Females hit adolescence approximately two years prior to males. In addition, African American females enter puberty ahead of their Caucasian counterparts (Huskey, 1998). In particular, by age eight, 48.3% of African American females and only 14.7% of Caucasian females begin the development of breasts and pubic hair (Huskey, 1998). The average age of the onset of menstruation for African American females (12.16 years) is four months younger than it was 30 years ago, while it has remained unchanged for Caucasian females (12.88 years) (Huskey, 1998). Thus, African American females are developing even earlier than both their male and female peers.

Growing males and females gain an average of approximately 3-4 inches per year in height. Weights vary drastically between and within the sexes during adolescence as well. By the time a female is 16, she has gained 98% of her height. By the time she is 18 she has likely gained 100% of her height. The average male body fat percentage is 10 – 15% whereas a female ranges between 20 – 25%. Lohman (1992) found that girls at age 8 have approximately 16% body fat and by the time they are age 14, their bodies consist of 22% body fat. When they hit their thirties, this number increases to 25+. In 1997 Janis and Mahoney noted that post-puberty levels of physical activity decreased in females by 19%.
During adolescence, female and male physical bodies differ greatly. Examples of this include: the development of wider shoulders (bi-achromial breadth) for males, the development of wider hips (bi-illiac breadth) for females, the development of longer forearms and longer legs for males, the development of more testosterone for males, and the development of more estrogen for females. It is during the catabolic process that females obtain more estrogen (similar process to the anabolic process found in males). As females gain more estrogen, there is an increase in adipose tissue embedded. In addition, it is during this process that females hypertrophy decreases (thus, making it more difficult for females to gain muscle mass). Menstruation begins at this point and the adolescent female is now on her way to adulthood. Please see the table below for a brief summary of the developmental differences between the sexes during adolescence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wider shoulders (bi-achromial breadth)</td>
<td>Narrower shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrower hips</td>
<td>Wider hips (bi-illiac breadth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer forearms</td>
<td>Shorter forearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer legs</td>
<td>Shorter legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More testosterone (but some estrogen)</td>
<td>More estrogen (but some testosterone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower body fat % (10-15%)</td>
<td>Higher body fat % (20-25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Physical differences between genders in adolescence.

From the above information, it becomes clear that males and females, who had similar characteristics as young children, have less in common as they become adolescents. This information is valuable to physical educators and those designing physical activity programs as it informs us that by the time youth reach the adolescent years, males and females are becoming less alike physically than they...
once were. As these differences increase, so too do the differences in motor
performance abilities. Males typically increase in motor performance and at the same
time, the motor performance of females typically decreases. Malina and Bouchard
(1991) have quantitatively documented this showing girls generally performed at a
lower ability than boys in strength exercises. Thus, it may be very important that we
do not evaluate males and females based solely on the traditional male characteristics
that are prevalent in many traditional multi-activity curriculum models (Lawson,
1998).

Pate et al. (1984) noted that decreases in physical activity accelerate during
adolescence. Adolescents are one-half as physically active as they were when they
were 6 years old. Sallis (1993) noted that boys decrease at a rate of 2.1% per school
year and girls decrease in physical activity at a rate of 7.4% per year. Thus, we can
see as children are aging, the activity levels are declining at a fast pace.

As females progress through adolescence, we see a decrease in physical
activity, a decrease in motor performance, and an increase in adipose tissue. It is also
documented that from a social developmental perspective, the importance of
interaction with parents decreases and the importance or value one places on their
peers (with regard to peer acceptance) is increased tremendously. Many physical and
psychological changes are occurring during adolescence for both males and females.
These changes can affect the attitudes an adolescent female has towards physical
activity, her physical abilities and even her interests. Knowing about the changes that
occur during this time period of "crisis" may help us in understanding the experiences
of adolescence more fully. Parents, typically have the most influence on youth with
regard to shaping gender roles for their children (Class, Gender, and Social Strat).
The traditional American message that parents send to youth is that behaviors related
to aggressiveness, independence, and achievement-orientation are most associated
with boys, and behaviors related to being passive, sociable, nurturing, and dependent
are associated with girls (Class, Gender, and Social Stratification).

Physical Activity and Adolescence

This section explores research on physical activity and adolescence. Section 1
explored physical activity in one particular realm, that of education. The second
section provided an overview of the adolescent years for adolescents. The goal of
section 3 is to explore research on physical activity in a more general sense and
outside of the school environment. This section provides an overview of the literature
relating to physical activity and adolescence.

Physical activity in children and adolescents has many benefits. Several
studies from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have found that
physical activity provides strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and
muscles, helps control weight, reduces stress and anxiety, increases self-esteem, and
may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels (CDC, 1997). Sallis and
McKenzie (1991) advocate a need to help our young children develop active lifestyles
that will persist into and throughout adulthood and achieve physical and emotional
health benefits.

Despite the benefits of physical activity many young people remain inactive.
Blair et al. (1989) found that although youth are the most active segment of the
United States population, there still exists a large portion of youth who are not active.
Only 50% of American young people ages 12 – 21 regularly participate in vigorous physical activity, and one-quarter report no vigorous physical activity (CDC, 1997). Rowland (1990) discovered that there is a 50% decline in physical activity between the ages of 6-16 though males are more physically active than females (Zakarian, et.al., 1994). In addition, the number of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years (CDC, 1997). Furthermore, African American females are among the largest group of inactive people (CDC, 1997). The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention suggested that the physical activity experiences we provide for adolescents should be centered around physical and social environments that enable safe and enjoyable participation in physical activity while at the same time enable students to participate in activities that meet their own personal unique needs and interests (CDC, 1997).

In 1996 the Surgeon General’s Report suggested that, as a nation, we address the topic of health and healthy lifestyles. It became quite clear in 1996 that teachers, coaches, and directors of physical activity programs should be more concerned helping adolescents achieve a healthy lifestyle. Obviously, if a major concern of the Surgeon General’s Report were health, funding would be available to study the different domains of health and to begin to uncover ways of improving the nation’s health. Two of the main organizations that have received substantial funding have been the National Institute of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Healthy People 2000 was written as a response to the Surgeon Generals Report, and this was followed with Healthy People 2010. Each of these documents
presented goals and recommendations for the nation. Healthy People 2010 has two major goals: to increase the overall health of the nation, and is to reduce the health disparities among people across all domains (gender, class, age, etc.) (USDHHS, 1999).

In addition, there are many different domains of recommendations in Healthy People 2010. One of these domains involves physical activity and discusses goals for our youth and adult populations. If we examine the physical activity goals for our youth, we see that some goals include: increasing the number of youth (particularly adolescents) who are vigorously active for at least 20 minutes a day for at least three days a week and increasing the percentage of youth who are moderately active five days a week. Another goal for schools is increasing the number of days and minutes that adolescents are required to participate in physical education. We know that many of our youth, although enrolled in physical education, are not participating in physical education class (USDHHS, 1999). In addition, data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS, 1999) indicate that males are more active than females and that Caucasian females are more active than females from other ethnic groups. Also, 41% of Adolescent African American females reported participating in vigorous physical activity for 20 or more minutes followed by adolescent female Latinos with 50% and adolescent female Caucasians 51% of the time. The YRBS (1999) indicated that physical activity participation rates drop as youth get older. In particular, an 18 year old expends one-half the energy that they expended as a 6 year old. The percentage of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years” (CDC, 1997, p. 1). In addition the odds are 28:1 that an obese adolescent will become obese
during adulthood (YRBS 1999). The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (1999) has indicated that Midwest youth are even more inactive than their coastal counterparts. Thus African American females residing in the Midwest may be at an even higher risk of low physical activity rates.

Over the years, a variety of programs (school-based and community-based) have been implemented (or are in the process of being implemented) to understand the health and wellness of the nation, and youth in particular. Examples of these include: CATCH, SPARK and TAAG. What we have learned from these programs is that while it is possible to increase levels of activity through educating children on activity topics, boys are more active than girls. We have discovered that teachers can indeed be trained to present this information (regarding physical activity, healthy lifestyles, etc.) to our youth, but many of our present elementary physical educators teach at several schools and are pulled in many directions and see their students too infrequently for this training to be of benefit to them.

In addition to these efforts, Taylor, Beech, Cummings (1997) presented several prominent interventions in ethnic minority populations. Included in these were: Know Your Body (KYB) and Dance for Health. KYB was a four-year study guided by the social cognitive theory, and was conducted for African American youth, grades 4-6 in Washington, DC. This intervention was classroom based and teacher delivered. The study attempted to improve nutrition, increase physical activity and prevent cigarette smoking. The study indicated that the intervention group was more fit than the control group at year 3.
Dance for Health was an aerobic program designed for African American and Hispanic adolescents to improve their aerobic capacity, maintain (or decrease) weight, and improve attitudes towards physical activity and fitness. This was a 12-week school based intervention combined with a culturally sensitive health curriculum for 110 boys and girls. The participants were between the ages of 10-13. Girls in the Dance for Health program significantly decreased their body mass index and resting heart rates, compared with girls in the usual physical activity group. Efforts such as these two interventions must continue to work on increasing physical activity levels for our youth.

Sallis et. al. (1999) looked at variables that influence physical activity among adolescents including age, race, gender, past activity involvement, sibling physical activity patterns, and perceived competency. They recommended the development of successful and fun physical education programs that cater to family physical activities. Corbin and Pangrazi (1999) suggest that although adolescence is when we see a huge drop off in activity rates, it is also the optimal time to educate our youth about physical activity.

There are a plethora of reasons as to why our youth (in particular adolescent young women and specifically, African American adolescents) possess low activity rates. These include minimal opportunities for physical activity, access to automobiles, increased interest in peers, lack of time, and unsafe environments (Sallis et al., 1999). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1997) has recommended educational policy changes, environmental changes, innovative school
physical education programs, and more after school and community based programs to help increase activity levels among youth.

In order to assess the best way to achieve these recommendations it is necessary first to assess the determinants. Determinants are what “determine” if we are to be active or not. The Prevention Institute (2001) noted three domains of determinants: physiological determinants, environmental determinants and psychological/social and demographic determinants. Within the realm of physiological determinants are: growth and development (how we grow and develop compared to our peers) physical fitness (levels of fitness) and gender (boys are more active than girls). Environmental determinants include: school environment (positive environment/safe equipment), seasonality (generally less active in cold months), other attracting sources (ie. television, radio) and safety. It has recently been noted that a portion of youth (and their parents) do not feel as though the environment is safe for them to be active. Psychological/social and demographic determinants include: self-efficacy, perceived barriers and benefits (of being physically active), gender socialization (how the media portrays gender and activity), parental influences (are parents active and do they encourage adolescents to be active?), peer influences (active friends), and knowledge (about benefits of physical activity). Sallis et al. (1999) identified specific demographic variables related to levels of physical activity. These include: sex (males more active than females), age (inversely related), ethnicity (Caucasians are the most active ethnic group), and past experiences with physical activity. Sallis, Simons-Morton, Stone, Corbin, Epstein, Faucette, et al. (1992) noted that higher SES is associated with increased physical activity. Zakarian...
(1994) noted that for low SES urban adolescents, self-efficacy, parent and friend support were all important in determining if adolescents were active. Sallis et al. (1999) suggested that when working with youth, we should strive to emphasize afternoon after-school activity, enjoyment of physical education and family involvement. Bungum and Vincent (1999) suggested that we approach increasing physical activity among adolescent Caucasian females differently than we approach African American females and females of other ethnicities.

In order to promote the overall health of young people, we must find ways to motivate youth to maintain physical activity. To do this, there is a need to better understand the determinants of physical activity for young people. Once we have an understanding of the determinants of physical activity, we may be able to more effectively design physical activity interventions.

Knowing there are different determinants of physical activity leads to the desire to know more about certain determinants. It would be helpful if we could have a better understanding of the psychosocial predictors of physical activity when designing these interventions. One recent study demonstrated the relationship between variables and physical activity in adolescent youth (Reynolds, Killen, Bryson, Maron, Taylor, Macoby and Farquhan, 1990). Longitudinal data from 743 (388 male and 355 female) 10th grade students (mean age of 15) in North Carolina were collected. Data were collected at baseline, (356 males and 324 females) four months (283 males and 174 females), and 16 months (233 males and 141 females) in a physical activity program. Boys and girls were placed in two large separate classrooms in groups of 40 – 50 and were asked to complete self-administered
questionnaires and physical measures. The questionnaire assessed demographics, knowledge and attitudes regarding health issues. Height, weight, resting heart rate and blood pressure were all collected as well. Predictor items were selected including: intention, self-efficacy (both taken at baseline) direct social influence, and stress scales (assessed at post-baseline four month period). A self-report of physical activity (19 activity items) was used to assess physical activity. Further work was done to calculate the number of times a subject participated in each activity per week. The results for intention, self-efficacy and social influence were calculated using Cronbach’s alphas. Regression analysis results indicated that psychosocial variables were significantly related to physical activity. Associations between intentions to exercise, self-efficacy, stress and direct social influence and physical activity were found (Reynolds, et.al., 1990). The results indicated the need to target these areas when designing intervention programs.

Zakarian et al. (1994) conducted a study to identify correlates of vigorous physical exercise in minority and low socioeconomic status adolescents. The subjects were from lower socioeconomic status working class backgrounds attending 9th and 11th physical education classes from six public junior and senior high schools in San Diego County. Physical education was a required course for the 9th graders but was not required for the 11th graders. Eight hundred fifteen females and 807 males completed a 40-minute paper and pencil questionnaire that asked about their physical activity habits during their physical education and homeroom classes. The analysis used SPSS/PC and statistical software; and in addition, multiple regression analysis was computed to separate males and females. The results were similar to that of three
other studies that found the determinants of physical activity may not differ greatly from that of their white counterparts. Males and 9th graders participated in significantly more vigorous exercise than did 11th graders and females. Correlates for both males and females were similar and included self-efficacy, friend support and family. There is a need to teach 9th graders physical activities they could voluntarily adopt and maintain throughout their lives. Males indicated that support of a friend was associated with higher levels of physical activity (Zakarian, et.al., 1994). There appeared to be a gender difference in the determinants of physical activity because the benefits of physical activity were perceived to be of greater importance for the males while the barriers were valued more for females (Zakarian, et.a., 1994). This provides insight as to how and why male and female adolescents differ significantly in activity levels and supports the idea that we should provide successful physical activity experiences in physical education in order to increase activity levels. Females indicated that family support and parental influences were indicators of physical activity (Zakarian, et al., 1994).

Lirgg & Feltz (1989) stated that how an adolescent female perceives her abilities will influence her choice of activities, amount of effort, and persistence that a person will put into completing a task. As girls move through adolescence, their self-esteem drops sharply, a drop far more pronounced in girls than in boys. In addition, a study by Lutter and Jaffee (1990) looked at the relationship between sports participation and self-esteem in girls ages 9 – 17 and found that girls derived their self-esteem from participation in sports and physical activities. The girls who had the highest self-esteem scores were the ones who were the most physically active (were
involved in more sports and for longer amounts of time). Lutter and Jaffee (1996) noted that females are more likely to participate in activities that get them into shape, are less competitive, fun, and provide them with an opportunity to socialize. This would include having more non-competitive activities for females with a major focus of the activity on the opportunity to socialize and be physically active. Some suggested strategies to encourage teenage girls to become more physically active from Lutter and Jaffee (1996) were to:

1. Encourage girls to speak out for increased opportunities for women and girls to engage in sports.

2. Provide activities that are fun, build skills, get young women in shape and enable them to socialize all at the same time.

As we review the research on adolescent females and motor development, motor performance and physical growth of high school aged females, we see that the work that has been done has attempted to categorize each female into one group. It is important to note that we are not dealing with a homogeneous group of females. Females (and males) from different cultures develop differently, as they are influenced by different histories, values, social norms, etc...

The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport recommends that we provide females with safe and healthy environments to foster their growth and maturation. Specifically the Presidents Council recommends daily physical education (require daily PE); enforce Title IX, develop innovative programs and provide safe activities in safe environments. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention echoes these ideas stating that it is important that we provide safe
environments, that state and local legislatures work together, that we provide daily physical education (quality physical education), and that we provide trained teachers and coaches.

"ON THE MOVE" is a program that was developed in California to decrease the inactivity levels of minority females. Several positive aspects of this program are: it is family centered, community based, and provides culturally relevant activities. A recent qualitative study of African American females and physical activity illustrated that the support systems for these women were friends, family and organizations (for example church was the most frequently mentioned organization). It seems apparent that if we want to promote physical activity among a population who is not active, that we should base our programs around appealing characteristics of a program for this particular population. If social support is important to a group, we should certainly embed this into the program design. Healthy People 2010 (USDHHS, 2000) argued that we need to decrease the inequities that exist with regard to health disparities (e.g. gender, SES, ethnicity, age). A more specific goal of Healthy People 2010 is to increase the proportion of adolescents who engage in moderate and vigorous physical activity. Although adolescent females are spending more time with peers, the relationship with parents and family remains important and often poses a conflict for the adolescent female. The growing female sees both worlds as important to her, and often has to choose one or the other as she struggles to create an equilibrium between time for friends and time for family. Guthrie, Caldwell and Hunter (1997) noted that minority adolescent females are often connected to a larger ethnic community. This community often reinforces the beliefs of "you can" or "we
will help the adolescent female rise above negative messages delivered from the dominant White culture. With this in mind, Guthrie, Caldwell and Hunter (1997) note that for minority females, it may be important to have older female adults (parents, grandparents) pair up with adolescents as they represent the future for adolescents at this stage of their life. Perhaps we should focus our attention not on providing a “one size fits all” program to ALL female adolescents or all adolescents, but instead on designing a variety (“many sizes”) of programs that are culturally relevant to many populations.

Physical Activity and Sport Among African American Females

Many scholars suggest that women of color have been silenced by being “suppressed, excluded, and misrepresented at every level of social interaction and have been placed at the margins by the dominant culture in society and sport (Gates, 1990). Women of color have historically been silenced in sport (Smith, 1992) with 5% or less of positions in coaching, teaching and sports administration staffed by culturally diverse women (Smith, 1991). These low numbers could attribute to the low numbers of African American adolescent female participants in that there are few role models within the system to help encourage them in physical activity.

Birrell (1990) notes that

One can count on one hand the number of published analyses that specifically focus on women athletes of color…..Some unpublished descriptive work on Black women athletes is available…..and we may find race as a variable in some of our research traditions….but no profound analyses have yet been begun. (p. 186).

There are a lack of role models in sport for African American women, and as noted by Oglesby (1981): “when the African American sportswoman looked to
society and physical education and sport systems to clarify and define her, she found that her images were either distorted and inaccurate or absent” (p. 3). Over the past two decades, women have become increasingly overweight, particularly African American women. Thirty-five percent of all black women between the ages of 20-34 are overweight, and are 20% above the “ideal” body weight for their height, frame, and age (White, 1994). It should be noted that typically the “norm” for healthy women has been developed on a population of white women, and we should not generalize what the norms are for body types of people from different races. As African American women age, the percentage of those who are overweight increases. Over 50% of black women between the ages of 45 and 55 are overweight. In general, there is a prevalence of excess weight, higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and other conditions in the Black community (White, 1994).

There are few African American female role models for the African American adolescents to look up to in both the physical education and organized sport settings. In addition, African American females are compared to their White counterparts and are expected to fit into the “norms” that exist for Caucasian women. In addition, it is noted that African American females often feel more positive about their body (size and shape). This positive feeling could lead to the idea that there is not a need to be physically active. These factors combined may have led to a decrease in participation in all forms (formal and informal) for the African American adolescent female.

Adolescents and Racial Identity

In our White, patriarchal society, “White beliefs, actions, values, language, and standards of beauty are developed as the norm or the standard for superiority in these
and other matters” (Oliver and Lalik, 2000, p. 11). African American adolescent girls are struggling to exist in a world that values the predominant standards of white beauty, skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Collins (1991) attributes African American women as being the “other” and treated like outsiders and strangers because of a racist and sexist culture in which these women live. bell hooks (1995) explained, that due to patriarchy and White supremacy, personal characteristics of women (skin color, hair length/texture) become the standards of beauty for all women. This White supremacy, patriarchal view has led to frustration for many Black women. Minority adolescent females are exposed to “two standards of beauty: one dictated by their own culture and the other based on European American standards” (Guthrie, Caldwell, & Hunter, 1997, p. 156).

For many young people, the emergence of adolescence often comes with a relational crisis. This is a time when the adolescent develops an awareness that it is “socially expected that one must separate and disconnect from family” (Stevens, 1997). Stevens (1997) notes that an important issue for African American female adolescents is “the perceived social expectation of, or demand for, separation from family and from one’s fictive kinship group” (p. 149). It is at this time that the African American teen perceives a societal devaluation for her gender, and a devaluation as a member of a racial minority.

The African American female is living through a time of struggle, facing the devaluation of both her gender and her race, and is at the same time trying to come to terms with her own identity formation (Stevens, 1997). The identity formation of African American adolescent females is “multidimensional and complex” (Stevens, 48
1997, p. 150). Stevens (1997) stated that African American female adolescents experience a “relational crisis in both racial and gender identity development” (p. 145). In addition, African American female adolescents develop “skillful, unique, expressionistic, and assertive styles of relating to negotiating perceived hostile environments” (p. 145). Adolescence is the time when the African American female teen perceives a societal devaluation for her gender, and a devaluation as a member of a racial minority. Adolescent African American females are experiencing devaluations for both their gender and their racial status in society. Perhaps due to the fact that they are being compared to the White standards, they are less likely to participate in physical activity, which could be viewed as being valued more from White standards. During this time of identity formation, physical activity may be affecting the formation of an identity, and the identity formation may affect participation in physical activity. Thus, it is important that we look at both racial identity development and gender identity development literature for the African American Adolescent female.

Racial identity is defined as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1993, p. 3). Helms (1995) noted that racial identity in the United States comes from “the tradition of treating race as a sociopolitical and, to a lesser extent, a cultural construction” (p. 181). Thus, an underlying assumption of racial groups in our country is that they experience either oppression or domination (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998)
Cross (1971, 1991, 1995) developed and revised a model to examine psychological Nigrescence. Nigrescence is a "resocializing experience" (Cross, 1995, p. 97) in which an individual's identity is transformed from one of non-Afrocentrism to one of Afrocentrism to multiculturalism. Cross described this process as a sequential five-stage process. The five stages include: Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internationalization, and Internationalization-Commitment. Adolescents, although can be found in any of the five stages, are most likely to be found in the Preencounter, Encounter or Immersion-Emersion stages.

Stage 1: Preencounter: It is in this first stage that individuals do not perceive race as being important, and instead long to be treated and accepted as "human beings". Cross' (1995) model states that Preencounter African Americans typically range from a low-salience (race-neutral) to anti-black.

Stage 2: Encounter: The second stage involves multiple small encounters that shatter an individuals current identity and worldview (Cross, 1995). This stage develops in two steps. The first step is the actual event(s). The second step is when an individual is affected by this event in a powerful way. At this point, a search for a new worldview begins and black identity emerges (Cross, 1995).

Stage 3: Immersion-Emersion: Cross (1995) describes stage 3 as the individual commits to the new identity and personal change. At this stage, individuals "simplify, fantasize, and romanticize new black self-images" (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 75). Stage three also has two phases. The first is a total immersion into blackness and withdrawing from other groups (particularly whites). Phase 2 is the movement into a more critical analysis of the new black identity.
Stage 4: Internalization: It is during this stage that the individual begins to resolve between the old identity and the new worldview. Cross (1995) notes that "blackness becomes one of several (biculturalism) or many (multiculturalism) saliencies" (p. 113).

Stage 5: Internalization-Commitment: The final stage of Cross's development involves translating the new identity into meaningful activities that address concerns of African Americans as well as other oppressed groups. The individual now thinks from a "we" perspective and leaves the egocentric "I" view behind.

Most adolescents would be in the first three stages. This could help better inform us as we study African American adolescent females. An example of how this could be useful is that if an adolescent female is in stage three (Immersion-Emersion), and is beginning to spend time exclusively with the Black population, and if physical activity is not regarded as being important within this culture, then by nature, this particular female may begin to withdraw from physical activities as she immerses herself into her new black identity. It is important that if we are to study adolescent African American females that we take the time to understand what may be going on from an identity perspective. For physical activity may affect both her movement through the stages, or at the same time, the movement through the stages may affect her involvement in physical activity.

Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 was divided into four sections (gender in education, adolescent years of the female, physical activity for adolescents in the United States, and African
American adolescent racial identity. Although these sections are different in nature, it is important to understand each of them and synthesize them into a more complete understanding of what is occurring in all aspects of the life of an African American adolescent female. Once we have a grasp on the multiple aspects that are being encountered during adolescence, perhaps then can we make better meaning of the experiences and perceptions of African American adolescent females and physical activity.

In addition, it is important to recognize that most of the epidemiological literature, particularly on physical activity and adolescents has been conducted using quantitative methods, particularly through surveys. Although survey data are beneficial, they have limitations as the data have been collapsed into means, providing participants with an either or choice and no opportunity to expand on their individual reasons and beliefs. To me, this implies that it is necessary that we incorporate qualitative methods of data collection into our work to better understand adolescent and adult involvement in physical activity. Perhaps such a base of knowledge can better assist us in comprehending how physical activity affects and is affected by the racial and gender identity of adolescents and of African American adolescent females in particular. This may lead to crafting physical education and physical activity programs that seek to reach social justice goals.
CHAPTER 3

The purpose of this study was fourfold: to determine the nature and scope of involvement in physical activity for four African American females (the co-researchers); to examine the co-researchers’ perceptions (positive, negative, or neutral) with regard to physical activity; to discover how physical activity functions in the lives of the co-researchers, and to find out who or what are the sources of influence with regard to the co-researchers’ beliefs about physical activity. This chapter discusses the theoretical framework and epistemology guiding the study; issues relevant to engaging in cross-cultural research, including researcher subjectivity; entree to the site; methodology; data collection and analysis; and considerations given to ensuring trustworthiness.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the “theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The epistemology of feminist theory is subjectivist (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). A subjectivist epistemology assumes that the viewer and viewed mutually create knowledge rather than discover one truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). “The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation
proceeds” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111, italics in original). A subjectivist approach requires a close relationship between researchers and participants to elicit from participants their own experiences, and thus, their own stories in their own words (Charmaz, 2000). For my area of inquiry a subjectivist epistemology was the natural fit because I was seeking to understand the experiences, perceptions, and meanings of physical activity in the co-researchers’ lives. Thus, it makes sense to use a subjectivist epistemology that assumes mutually created knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

Political and economic inequalities of society as a whole contribute to inequalities that exist in other domains, for example education (Apple, 1996). Scholars have noted the achievement gaps between White students and students of color as well as higher drop out rates for students of color (Lomotey, 1990; Stevens, 1996). It seems that the educational system continues to reproduce sexist, classist, and racist beliefs in physical education and sport as well as the more general educational system. For instance, sport is a domain that not only welcomes boys and men more readily than girls and women, but also celebrates skills that are clearly masculine (Birrell, 2000).

Thomson (1998) noted that many Whites take on a “color blind” approach to diversity (divided by ethnicity, race, and class) and this leaves many Whites ignorant of differences within and across cultural communities that contribute to the short term and long term effects of racism. West (1994) stated that our feelings about those who are different than us are often characterized by feelings of suspicion, fear, and mistrust. These divisions act as a barrier to promoting a socially just society.
The question is how can we as well-informed and committed physical educators help to eradicate, or at least minimize, inequalities rather than reproduce them? I propose that as an initial step, research in education use a feminist approach. Much current research in physical education and sport uses a quantitative approach that emphasizes typical male characteristics such as aggression and strength as the basis of comparison. On the other hand, feminist research distinguishes itself by its "deliberate focus on gender combined with an emphasis on emancipatory goals" (Kirsch, 1999, p. 7). More specifically, one strand of feminism that is particularly useful for exploring power differences is critical cultural feminist theory, which examines the intersection between race, class, and gender. To me, it seemed natural that if African American females, particularly those in poverty are the least active segment of our society, that we should view this study through a lens that focuses on the interrelationship of race, class, and gender. Therefore I selected critical cultural feminism as the theoretical framework to guide this study. Set forth below is an overview of feminist theory, in particular critical cultural feminism, and the general principles of feminist research.

Feminist Theory

The earliest goal of feminist theory was to describe sexist thinking and how we could change such thinking and the inequitable behavior it fosters (hooks, 2000). Much of the recent scholarship on feminism has focused on distinguishing among the many different types of feminisms, including among others, liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, and critical cultural feminism. However, Birrell (2000) noted that rather than concentrating only on how feminisms differ:
it is more useful to conceive of feminist theories in the plural, as a series of theoretical approaches marked by rapid development and comprised of an intermix of voices and responses to earlier theoretical traditions . . . as hard as we scholars might work to simplify it, it refuses to be disciplined into discrete categories. (p. 62)

Regardless of how we view feminism, and in this case, feminism as related to sport, there is one central goal: to theorize about our patriarchal society and the gender relations that exist within this society (Birrell, 2000). Though feminist theory is blurred rather than neat and clear, it has important implications for the need for social change in sport. Therefore, rather than allowing the differences among feminisms to hinder the research process, I think it is appropriate to use a particularly inclusive strand of feminism, namely critical cultural feminism.

Critical Cultural Feminism

Cultural studies is a “field in which different disciplines intersect in the analysis of culture defined as the social forms through which human beings ‘live’ become conscious, (and) sustain themselves subjectively” (Johnson, 1983, p. 24). Inglis (1993) noted that cultural studies examines “culture in action.” One approach to cultural studies is feminist critical cultural studies. Critical cultural feminists view power as distributed and reproduced inequitably in society, particularly through gender, race, and class, and that the power of those in dominant positions within society is constantly contested (Birrell, 2000). This strand of feminism was “the logical product of the moves to theorize difference through synthesis” (Birrell, 2000, p. 67). Critical cultural feminists focus on the differences among identities by...
exploring the intersection of identities rather than exploring each dimension of identity separately. By synthesizing identity dimensions, the focus is placed on specific rather than generalized inequalities. For instance, the focus can be on inequalities relevant to African American females, rather than just African Americans, or just females.

The underlying beliefs about feminist critical cultural studies in sport relate to “power and how gender relations are reproduced by, resisted in, and transformed through sport” (Birrell, 2000, p. 67). Birrell (1998) identified four central themes that are studied with critical feminist cultural studies: (a) the production of an ideology of male power through sport, (b) the media practices through which dominant notions of women are reproduced, (c) physicality and sexuality as sites for defining gender relations, and (d) dominant sports practices and resistance to women. Much of the literature demonstrates the need for infusion of critical cultural feminism in sport.

Feminist Research

The principles of feminist theory translate into feminist research practices. In particular, the feminist theory’s emphasis on reducing power differences strongly influences the relationship between the researcher and participants. My emphasis on critical cultural feminism caused me to consider power differences among everyone involved in the research in terms of race, class, and gender. Kirsch (1999) noted that feminist research principles include, but are not limited to particular concepts. I have listed these principles below and provided a brief statement with examples of how I attended to the feminist research practices as suggested by Kirsch, in this study.
• ask research questions which acknowledge and validate women’s experiences;
  o The purpose of this study was to acknowledge and validate the co-researchers experiences in physical activity by learning about their experiences in physical activity and physical education.

• collaborate with participants as much as possible so that growth and learning can be mutually beneficial, interactive, and cooperative;
  o Throughout the study I collaborated and worked with the co-researchers. The goal of the focus group interviews was to design a physical activity program that could be implemented at the church. This activity was beneficial to me as a researcher and to the church by providing insight as to the types of physical activities the girls found interesting, and beneficial to the girls as a potential physical activity offered by the church that they designed and had some ownership of the activity.

• analyze how social, historical, and cultural factors shape the research site as well as the participants’ goals, values, and experiences
  o The goal of this research was to deconstruct how gender, class and race influenced the perceptions and experiences of the four females in physical activity.
• analyze how the researchers’ identity, experience, training and theoretical framework shape the research agenda, data analysis, and findings
  o My identity as a White feminist researcher has greatly influenced what I chose to study, and the lens through which I viewed the research. It was critical to me that I analyzed data based on the intersection of gender, class and race, as my personal experiences in teaching, coaching, and participating in physical activity have led me to believe that it is not one of these dimensions that affect what we do, but the intersection of all three.
• correct andocentric norms by calling into question what has been considered “normal” and what has been regarded as “deviant”;
  o I focused on the physical activity experiences of the four females in this study, and did not compare them to experiences of male norms. Instead, I focused on learning what was important about their personal experiences. It was important to me that I not have standards to which I compared their experiences but rather valued the experiences they shared with me.
• take responsibility for the representation of others in research reports by assessing probable and actual effects on different audiences;
While writing up the stories of the girls, I attempted to do so in a non-judgmental way. While writing up this study, I have fully acknowledged that these are my interpretations, and that other individuals may have alternative interpretations. In addition, I worked closely with the females to make sure how I presented them was accurate and that I was not creating an identity for them that wasn’t truly who they were.

- acknowledge the limitations of and contradictions inherent in research data, as well as alternative interpretations of that data. (p. 5)

- I provide rich, thick data throughout the study so that the reader can interpret what is and is not relevant to their particular setting. In addition, I fully acknowledge that my personal experiences have led to my interpretations of the data, and if someone else had brought different experiences, the stories may have been presented differently.

A feminist research agenda includes a commitment to improving women’s lives and eliminating inequalities between researchers and participants (Kirsch, 1999). It was important to me to utilize each of Kirsch’s suggestions for maintaining feminist research throughout the duration of this research study.

As a researcher, I maintained my commitment to a feminist perspective and that perspective guided this study. The framework helped guide the types of data collected, the ways data were collected, the types of interview questions asked, and the activities that were done throughout the study. One example of my commitment to
feminist research is that I maintained a principle throughout my study that I would be committed to insuring the involvement of the co-researchers to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship. In addition, a concern of several of the co-researchers’ mothers was that their daughters not miss Bible Study in order to collaborate with me in the study. I took it upon myself to respect this, and met with the girls at times that did not interfere with Bible Study. Sara was the one case for which this was not an option, and thus, I met with her before Bible Study if she was able to arrive early. In situations when Sara did not arrive early, I would go to Bible Study with her and we had our interview once Reverend Thunder gave us permission to meet. Another example is that I met Octavia at her home for an interview when her mother was not home one Wednesday night. During the interview I discovered that Octavia’s mother was not able to take her to dance practice that evening. I offered to take Octavia to and from dance practice. Octavia and her mother accepted the offer. I drove Octavia to practice, observed the dance practice, and drove her home that evening. It was my intent throughout the entire research process to minimize my interference in the lives of the co-researchers, and help out whenever possible.

Researcher Subjectivity

Due to the close relationship between the researcher and the co-researchers in the mutual construction of knowledge, it is imperative that I situate myself as a researcher, including how my identity influenced my interests and intentions. As Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) stated: “We have a responsibility to talk about our identities, why we interrogate what we do, what we choose not to report, how we frame our data, on whom we shed our scholarly gaze, who is protected and not
protected as we do our work” (p. 123). In keeping with this maxim, I disclose the following: I am a White woman and have been involved in physical activity and sports for the past 27 years. I began engaging in informal physical activity by the age of five and in organized youth leagues at the age of eight. I played three sports throughout the year in high school and played varsity field hockey at a Division I college. I then spent six years in the world of collegiate coaching. Although my experiences in sport have been many, the diversity of these experiences, having occurred primarily in a monocultural arena, suffers limitations. As I reflect upon my personal journey in physical activity, I realize that through the formal world of sports, I came in direct contact (through playing or coaching) with individuals who were of a different ethnicity to me, only five times in the past 27 years. My personal experiences and observations have illustrated that with the exception of perhaps basketball and track, the world of women’s athletics is dominated by White players and coaches.

Honestly, I never reflected upon African American participation in sport until graduate school. My attention was first drawn to inactivity among African American adolescent females when I was conducting observations at an urban high school for a student teaching requirement. For perhaps the first time in my life, I found myself out of my natural and comfortable element, as I was a minority in a predominantly African American school. I recall feeling nervous and intimidated at first, but as I took a step back from the experience at the end of the school day, I realized this was the first time I had been a minority and I wondered what it felt like to be a minority all the time. With regard to diversity, this experience had more impact on me than any
other in my life. It was one thing to have read about difference, but actually experiencing it and being “the other” brought the reality home.

I then had the opportunity to observe “open gym” basketball games during lunchtime at this and other schools and noticed that the participants were African American males. I inquired as to what activities were offered during free time that would attract African American females and discovered that there were no options other than the open-gym male-dominated basketball games. I then decided to offer a lunchtime walking program at the school as part of my Master’s Thesis, hoping it would provide an opportunity for females to participate in physical activity, which it did.

After the experience of offering a walking program and having females participate in it, I began to seek the reasons why African American adolescent females are the least active segment of adolescents? I doubted this portion of our population was just born to be inactive with the onset of adolescence. What was this statistic of low participation related to? Was it the result of how we measure physical activity? Was it that African American adolescents, particularly those living in poverty had other responsibilities and could not devote time to physical activity? Was it that the activities we offered did not coincide with their particular social norms and values? These are examples of the questions I contemplated that show how I arrived at the research questions for this study. It grew evident to me, as I considered these questions, that my research could not be pursued from the single dimension of gender, but would require attention to the intersection of race and class as well.

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Engaging in Cross-Cultural Research

Not only do the epistemological assumptions guiding this research require me to consider who I am as a researcher, but also to take into account the fact that I am engaging in cross-cultural research. My goal as a researcher was to immerse myself in the experiences of my co-researchers in order to understand their perspective on their experiences in physical activity as fully as possible. Throughout the research process, the question I constantly asked myself the question which was the backbone of this study; what do I need to know and understand in order to craft more deliberate and richer experiences for African American females so they may participate in physical activity more regularly and consequently reduce the number of risk factors relating to their health later on in life.

My goals as a researcher to fully understand the views of the co-researchers could not have been met without attempting to build a strong partnership and rapport with them. In order to achieve the type of relationship necessary for the research, I centered my attention on building trust and reciprocity with the persons at the church where the study was to be conducted before initiating the study. I spent nine months at the site prior to collecting data with the purpose of immersing myself in the culture of the church and creating an authentic, reciprocal relationship with the co-researchers. It was very important to me that I not only use the church to satisfy my own needs regarding research, but also to create a relationship based on reciprocity. The information gained from this study has subsequently been shared with the Youth Minister at Friend Church. In addition, both of the focus group discussions included conversations on what the co-researchers thought would be good physical activities to
offer at the church. The Youth Minister plans to incorporate their suggestions into the church’s youth events this summer.

Despite my efforts at building reciprocity, there are challenges to being a White researcher in an African American setting. Gaining the trust and respect of the co-researchers was not always easy. Although I felt welcomed by the co-researchers and the people at Friend Church in general, it was often a roller-coaster ride with many hills to climb up and ride down. I do believe, though, that much of this was related to the age of the participants. I understand that the political dimensions and time-intensity of cross-cultural research, as well as the age of the researchers, influenced the research process in this study.

Yet, in addition to the age differences and my lack of attendance at Sunday services, it was difficult (if not impossible) to avoid the race, class, and power dimensions. One way that I tried to handle these differences was by being upfront about them. For instance, I knew that prior to conducting this research, I was not personally aware of formal or informal physical activities organized or conducted within the African American communities. It was my view that, since I was a White female who had been educated predominantly by White educators, it was my responsibility to ask for the assistance of the community I was attempting to learn from in order to form a partnership with them and educate myself about their culture. In turn, this will allow me to more efficiently prepare future physical educators to teach the diverse children they will have within the walls of their gymnasiums.

Relationships with research subjects are never equal and the political context in which research takes place cannot be changed (Anderson, 1993). In my work I
fully acknowledged the existence of different power relations and therefore spent time getting to know the co-researchers and build trust. I attempted to create what Fine (1992) referred to as “a warm space for treacherous talk” (p. 6) for all the people involved in this study. Understanding that there is “no intimacy without reciprocity” (Oakley, 1981, p. 49), I exhibited my human side when interacting with my co-researchers. I answered questions posed to me and did not attempt to conceal my emotions. This approach hopefully provided “a greater spectrum of responses and greater insight into the lives of respondents – or participants [co-researchers],” and avoided the hierarchical pitfall (Reinharz, 1992, p. 22). I also realized that in the interactions with the co-researchers, there was a danger that they would respond with what they believed I wanted to hear, and not what they believed about the particular issue. After initiating contact with these four young women and asking for their help to determine what role physical activity has played in their lives, I was fortunate that the co-researchers welcomed me and accepted the time commitment of developing a partnership and sharing their ideas and beliefs with me.

Although I was welcomed, I realized that cross-cultural research brought with it many more tensions. As a White researcher studying people of a different race, I ran the risk of “othering” the participants. As part of the research process, I had to think about how as a researcher I spoke “of” or “for” others (Fine, 1994). Fine (1994) referred to this as working the “self-other hyphen,” which is “the hyphen that separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of Others” (p. 70). By working the hyphen, Fine meant that researchers must:
Probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations . . . working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, ‘happening between,’ within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, and with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence. (p. 72)

By failing to work the hyphen, researchers preserve the social order and obscure the researcher’s privileged position (Fine, 1994). By keeping the lines of communication open between the co-researchers and myself, by being honest about asking for assistance, and by continuously reflecting on the influence of my identity, I tried to “work the hyphen” and engage in socially responsible research. It was important to me that I share summaries of each of the stories with the individual co-researcher so that I was certain I was capturing the meanings they wanted me to capture. In addition, it was important to me that I learn about each of their families as much as possible so not to impose my own assumptions about their family backgrounds. Finally, I checked with each of them to be sure that they were represented in writing as they wanted to be represented. These are examples of how I attended to what Fine (1994) suggests as working the hyphen.

Methodology

Patton (1990) voiced that understanding certain questions is more consistent with the use of qualitative methods than others. Qualitative methods are appropriate for the subjectivist assumptions of feminist research because they allow for the
meaning that the co-researchers make of their experiences with physical activity and sport to be deeply explored as relationships develop among the co-researchers. Qualitative methods provide data that allow the researcher to understand the participant perspectives and can assist educators in understanding the complexity and context within classrooms (Rink, 1993). This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the four research questions. A qualitative case study design was used, with each of the four co-researchers in the study being considered an individual case. Creswell (1998) described a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded’ system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth, data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Multiple sources of data are used in case study research in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 1998). A qualitative case study “is characterized by researchers spending time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on” (Merriam, 1998, p. 445). Case study methodology lends itself to feminist research in that it allows the researcher and participant to be in close, personal contact.

Setting for the Research Study

The site where I obtained access to the co-researchers was a large Baptist church in the Midwest. Friend Church is a large African American community with approximately 1,500 members in its congregation. Friend Christian Academy (grades k - 6) is housed on the church site. Friend Church was purchased in 1929 and Dr. Leader is the ninth pastor of the church, and has been the pastor since 1978. Under
the spiritual leadership of Dr. Leader, the church bulletin notes that Friend Church has been “blessed with the following”:

*A tremendous increase in church membership
*An increase in the offerings annually
*The creation of two paid staff positions
*Leadership training courses, tutoring program and clothing bank
*24-hour telephone prayer ministry
*Weekly radio broadcasts (heard in 65 counties)
*Mid-week Bible study at the noon hour
*Weekly in-depth Bible study
(Friend Church Pamphlet, 2001).

The majority of the members of Friend Church have attended for five or fewer years (Table 3.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Years Attending Church</th>
<th>Total Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>589</td>
<td>0 - 5</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>260</td>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248</td>
<td>11 - 15</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197</td>
<td>25 (+)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Length of membership in years and percentages at Friend Church.

The marital status breakdown of Friend Church is as follows: One hundred sixty-nine members are divorced, 461 members are married, 783 members are single, 6 members are separated, and 94 are widowed (see Table 3.2).
Seven percent of the members are between the ages of 0 – 13; 6% between the ages of 14 – 18; 9% between the ages of 19-25; 53% between the ages of 26-55; and 25% between the ages of 56-110 (see Table 3.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Marital status in numbers and percentages at Friend Church.

Friend Church offers many programs each week for both youth and adults. One of the programs is Newly Anointed Victorious Youth (N.A.V.Y.). It was established to meet the needs of middle school and high school youth. The mission statement of N.A.V.Y. is that it “exists to holistically touch and empower the lives of teenagers so they in return can affect and impact the masses for Christ” (Church Pamphlet, 2000). The Youth Group (N.A.V.Y.) meets each Tuesday evening from 7:00pm until 8:30p.m. In addition there is a tutoring program for students attending the church prior to the Youth Group meeting. Students from a local university assist in the tutoring. To provide a context of the objectives and focus of the Youth Ministry, I have listed the five objectives of N.A.V.Y.:

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W-Worship: Provides a place for teens to worship and reverence God in their own unique style.

I-Instruction: Provides holistic (biblical, social and cultural) instruction to middle school and high school students.

F-Fellowship: Provides monthly activities for teens to interact with one another.

E-Evangelism: Provides training and opportunities for teens to share their faith with friends.

M-Ministry: Teaches teens to use their talents and gifts to the glory of God.

There are several different Ministries that exist for the youth at Friend Church including: Youth Leadership Ministry, Expressions of Praise II, Music Ministry, Youth Ushering Ministry, Hattie Jackson Teenage Guild (Girls 2 Ladies), and Sons of David (Boys 2 Men). A brief description of each Ministry is presented.

**Youth Leadership Ministry:** Four to five teenagers are selected each year as members of the Leadership Board to provide leadership to the youth ministry.

**Expressions of Praise II:** Dance, drill and drama ministry. Expressions of Praise II provides an opportunity for teens to show their talents and gifts for the glory of God.

**Music Ministry:** Youth use their musical talents and participate in the Youth and Young Adult Ensemble.

**Youth Ushering Ministry:** Youth participate in the ushering Ministry.

**Hattie Jackson Teenage Guild (Girls 2 Ladies):** Hattie Jackson Teenage Guild exists to assist young ladies through their developmental stage.

**Sons of David (Boys 2 Men):** Sons of David is a mentoring program to assist young men through their developmental stage.

Specific information regarding the core beliefs of Friend Church and the role that the church plays in the lives of its members will be presented in Chapter 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-13</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-25</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-55</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-110</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Demographics of the Friend Church congregation.

Entrée

The particular site of a Midwest Baptist church was chosen because of a partnership that a university faculty member, Dr. Unity, had established with the church. Dr. Unity was responsible for forming a partnership with this church to assist in educating Master’s students to become or move forward in multicultural competency. I first contacted Dr. Unity and described some of my thoughts and ideas for a study. We then engaged in a more detailed conversation regarding my interest in this study. Afterwards I met with a member of the church responsible for running the Youth Group Bible study (N.A.V.Y.), Reverend Thunder, in order to discuss my intentions within the church community and the reasons behind them. It was critical in this meeting to communicate that my intention was not to form a typical research relationship with this community, but to create a partnership built on respect and
trust, and based on reciprocity. I was welcomed back the following week to meet with
the adolescents, and spent the next nine months at the site, interacting with and
observing the youth at Bible Study, particularly the adolescents, for two hours a
week. I felt it was very important to get to know different aspects of the church
culture and the activities offered there. I also wanted to get to know the Youth Group
members before embarking on the study. Each of these steps that I took to develop
reciprocal, non-hierarchical relationships was driven by the feminist tenets that
guided this study.

Summary of Data Collection

A feminist perspective guided both the data collection for this study and the
analysis of the collected information. Multiple sources of data are used in a case study
to gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 1998). The data collected
were from the co-researchers and the church and family members of the co-
researchers. Specifically I collected information about the four adolescent co-
researchers using: individual interviews (n= 3), focus group interviews (n= 2), an
observation at their respective schools, and document analysis of their writing
activities. Data collection from the informants involved: an individual interview with
Reverend Thunder along with several observations of her work with the youth,
individual interviews with Sam’s and Octavia’s mothers, and interviews with one
teacher for each of the four co-researchers. I was not able to interview two of the co-
researchers’ mothers because their schedules were too busy. See Table 3.4 for
research questions and data collection methods for each research question. Table 3.5
illustrates the data gathering methods and the time associated with each method. Prior
to data collection, all participants and guardians signed a consent form (see Appendix A) to be part of the study and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Co-Researchers

Four youth, who regularly attended Friend Church, were recommended by Reverend Thunder as potential co-researchers for the study. When she asked them if they would participate in the study, all four agreed. An additional adolescent at the church was asked to assist in pilot testing the interview questions. She accepted her role and helped out when needed. These adolescents were chosen, in part, because of their regular attendance at the Youth Group Bible Study sessions. The four co-researchers ranged in age from 15 to 18 years. Each of the four co-researchers attended a different high school within the public school system. Each co-researcher described her families' socioeconomic status as middle class. A more detailed summary of each of the four co-researchers will be introduced in chapter four at the start of the individual case studies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What is the nature and scope of involvement in physical activity for these four African American adolescent females? | Individual Interview 1, 2, 3  
Parent Interview 1  
Physical Education Teacher  
Observing in Schools and PA programs |
| 2. What are the perceptions (positive, negative, and neutral) with regard to physical activity for these four African American adolescent females? | Focus Group Interview 1  
Individual Interview 1, 2, 3  
Physical Education Teacher  
Observing in Schools and PA programs |
| 3. How does physical activity function in the lives of these four African American adolescent females? | Individual Interview 1, 2, 3  
Parent Interview  
Physical Education Teacher  
Reverend Thunder Interview  
Observing in Schools and PA programs |
| 4. Who or what are the sources of influence on the co-researchers beliefs and involvement in physical activity? | Focus Group Interview 1  
Individual Interview 1, 2, 3  
Parent Interview |

Table 3.4: Data collection strategies by research question.

Data Collection

*Individual Interviews*

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) noted that interviews “have become a taken-for-granted feature of our mediated, mass culture” (p. 633). Far from taking them for granted, however, this researcher believes interviews constitute an appropriate and successful method of gaining an understanding of adolescent experiences in physical activity that could represent to some extent the values of the culture of these youth. In
addition, as noted by Marshall & Rossman (1995), interviews provide a better understanding of the meanings people have for everyday activities. Interviews can provide us with an opportunity to learn about what cannot be observed directly or quantified, such as thoughts, feelings, and intentions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990).

Further, I chose this particular data collection method because of the feminist perspective that it is of great importance to listen to the voices of the participants. As noted by Fontana and Frey (2000), it is important to try to understand how the participants make meaning of the world rather than superimposing the researcher’s perspective onto the participants. Therefore, I had to be aware at all times how my identity shaped the interviews, including the questions I asked, the co-researchers’ responses, and how I heard those responses. Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) noted that the interview is a negotiated text where power, class, gender and race intersect.

All interviews for this study were audiotaped with the permission of the participant (parent, youth pastor, or teacher) and then transcribed within two weeks of the interview. Most were transcribed within 24 hours. All transcriptions were compared to the tapes to assist with accuracy. Seidman (1991) provides several benefits of tape recording interviews including: researchers have the original data; tapes are a source to check for lack of clarity; recording benefits participants as they can be assured access to the tapes; and reviewing tapes allows the researcher to study their interviewing technique. In addition, I transcribed the tapes with the understanding and intent that “interviewers who do their own transcribing come to know their interviews better” (Seidman, 1991, p. 88). This was extremely important
to me. I wanted to conduct the interviews and transcribe them myself as close to the
time of the interview as possible so that I could remember the details of the interview,
including the tones used, facial expressions, and hand gestures.

The goals of the individual interviews of the co-researchers in this particular
study were to: examine the nature and scope of physical activity for the four females,
learn about the positives and negatives with regard to physical activity for each of the
them, learn about how physical activity functioned in their lives, and learn who or
what sources these four females drew upon to inform their beliefs about physical
activity. I tested the relevance of the interview questions by asking an African
American adolescent female who attended Friend church, Flo, to listen to the
questions and to inform me whether or not she understood the intent of the questions.

Three individual interviews with each co-researcher were conducted. When
clarification was needed, I telephoned the participant and asked follow up questions.
Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to two hours to conduct. This study
utilized open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, to which the co-researchers
were allowed to respond in their own words. In addition, I answered questions asked
by the participants and shared my personal feelings when I felt it was necessary and
appropriate to stray from the distanced researcher’s seat. I felt it critical to probe the
responses and the co-researchers elaborated when asked to. This aspect of probing
became a joke between us. By the third round of individual interviews, the co-
researchers were in the habit of saying “are you going to ask why?”, and when I
responded “yes,” they replied “I thought so.”
Individual interviews occurred at different sites for different participants in order to accommodate their schedules. All three of Tynesha’s interviews were conducted at a different fast food restaurant. I drove to her house and took her to a place to conduct the interview and eat dinner. All three of Octavia’s interviews were held in her home. On one occasion I provided dinner for her. All three of Sara’s interviews were conducted at Friend Church on Tuesday nights. This was most convenient for her and her mother. All three of Sam’s interviews were during her lunch break at the site where she did her community service for a school requirement.

The purpose of the first individual interview was to gain an understanding of how each of the participants spent their time during the week and on weekends. We completed an activity that I titled “Time of Your Life” (see Appendix B). The co-researchers talked about how they spent each hour during their day. I probed when necessary, such as: where do you eat breakfast? with whom do you eat breakfast? what do you usually eat for breakfast? etc. It was important that I first understand how the co-researchers spent their time, and with whom, before learning additional information about their lives. I felt asking non-threatening questions about places they spent their time and what they did with their time was a nice way to gain their trust.

The purpose of the second individual interview (which occurred two weeks later) was to learn with whom the participants spent their time and to learn about the “characters” in their life. This was a socio-gram activity that I titled “Circles of My Life” (see Appendix C). The co-researchers were given a sheet of paper that had Home, Church and School written inside three separate circles. The data for these three arenas (home, church, school) were drawn from interview #1, which had
indicated that all four of the participants primarily spent their time at home, school and church. The activity included two other circles that were blank. The co-researchers were asked to write in other places they spent their time. If needed, they could draw more circles. Each co-researcher was permitted to pick the starting place. She then wrote down with whom she spent time in that particular site. I then asked questions such as: what kinds of things do you do with this person? To what degree is this person active? How do you think this person perceives the importance of physical activity? This interview gave me insight about whom each co-researcher spent her time with, if she spent her time with males or females, if these individuals were active or inactive, and I probed as necessary to learn the race of these individuals. Following the second interview, I asked each co-researcher to complete a writing activity which I titled “Five Words My Friends Would Describe Me As Are” (see Appendix D): The co-researchers were to list five words their friends would use to describe them. This information helped me gain an understanding of how the co-researchers thought their friends perceived them, thereby giving me further insight into each individual in the study.

The purpose of the third interview (conducted two weeks after interview #2) was to follow up on questions from the first two interviews and to engage in conversation about gender roles in physical activity, about different perceptions of physical activities based on race, and to participate in an activity that looked at different body types. Please see Appendix E for interview questions. There was a basic script for each co-researcher, but this was supplemented with several interview questions that were specific to their answers during interview 1 and interview 2. At
the conclusion of interview 3, each co-researcher was asked to complete a writing activity titled “Five Words to Describe Me Are”: (Appendix F). This was to give me an understanding of their individual perceptions of themselves. In addition, I asked each co-researcher to complete a writing activity where they projected what their life might look like in five years and then in ten years.

*Focus Group Interviews*

Two focus group interviews, each lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes, were conducted. Again, the feminist perspective that guided this research caused me to use focus groups since:

Focus groups minimize the control the researcher has during the data gathering process by decreasing the power of the researcher over research participants. The collective nature of the group interview empowers the participants and validates their voices and experiences. (Madriz, 2000, p. 838)

Each interview was tape-recorded. The first focus group interview occurred at Friend Church between the first and second individual interviews. Pizza and soda were provided. The purpose of the first focus group was to talk about barriers and benefits of physical activity, to learn about what the co-researchers believed were available sources through which to get involved in physical activity, and to begin discussion on what physical activity the co-researchers might recommend to Reverend Thunder for incorporation into activities at the church. Sam, Octavia and Sara were present for the first focus group interview. This information better informed me as to the barriers and benefits of physical activity for the co-researchers. By completing this focus group activity together, the co-researchers thought of
additional ideas that they did not think of in their individual interviews. The second focus group was conducted at Friend Church after the third individual interview with each co-researcher. The purpose was to discuss in more detail physical activities to offer at Friend Church. Tynesha, Octavia and Sara were present for this discussion. This interview better informed me about the various physical activities in which the co-researchers were interested.

Observations

I believe it was useful not only to interview the co-researchers, but also to observe them in other activities. Denzin (1989) noted that “participant observation is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in the day-to-day experiences” (p. 156). Loftland (1971) recognized that interviewing and observing participants go hand in hand and that many of the data gathered in participant observation are collected through informal interviews while in the field. I had hoped that the observations of the co-researchers at school and at dance practice would inform aspects of my conversations with them. For example, I was able to observe a particular behavior of Sam’s in her physical education class, and then speak with her about this in an interview. Researchers involved in participant observation carefully observe systematic experiences, and consciously record, in detail, the many aspects of a situation. While I know that I cannot truly adopt the perspectives of the co-researchers, observations helped me get closer to their lives, minimizing the extent to which I impose my own worldview onto their stories. Again, this was important in light of the feminist perspective guiding this study. As a participant observer, I was required to analyze my observations continually for meaning and bias (Glesne, 1999).
Observations for this study occurred at the church and in the high schools each girl attended. The observations provided me with an opportunity to observe the co-researchers in different environments. I was also able to gain a better understanding of their experiences at the church as I attended the dance practice there (as each co-researcher was involved in the dance program) on several occasions. I took observation notes at dance practice three times regarding how many of the co-researchers were present, and their participation throughout the evening. These observation notes were expanded upon immediately after every visit. I also observed each co-researcher in one class at her school. When possible (Sam and Octavia), this was a physical education class, but when it was not possible (Sara and Tynesha), I observed a class of their choice (Spanish and orchestra).

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis is a method of collecting data in a manner that does not interfere with everyday events. Marshall and Rossman (1995) noted that document analysis is unobtrusive and non-reactive. Documents such as church and school pamphlets and web pages were reviewed, paying particular attention to the mission statements and goals of each program. The church pamphlets and web page were looked at to inform me of the types of programs offered at the church, and the mission and beliefs of the church. The school web pages were reviewed to gain an understanding of the demographics of the school, the goals of the school, and the particular focus of the school. These documents were utilized to enhance the study by providing the primary researcher with a basic understanding of the church and schools involved.
Writing Activities

The purpose of utilizing writing activities as a method to collect data in this study was to allow the co-researchers to have a “safe space” to share their experiences, perceptions and thoughts that they may not have felt comfortable sharing during focus group or individual interviews. I provided each co-researcher with a topic and an outline of what I wanted her to write about. The first writing activity was distributed to Octavia, Sara and Sam on the evening of focus group #1. This activity asked for their definition of physical activity and a description of the physical activities they engage in on a weekly basis, and the physical activities they have participated in over the past year. The second writing activity, distributed after the third interview, required the co-researchers to anticipate what their life would look like (with regard to college/work; social life; and family circumstances) in five years and in ten years and why they made these predictions. I wanted to gain an understanding of the directions in which each co-researcher anticipated her life heading and to see if she included physical activity as part of her future. The final writing activity asked the co-researchers to define the term “hero” or “heroine,” select three heroes or heroines, and share why they perceived these particular individuals as such. The purpose of this activity was to gain an understanding of who was important to each of these four females. The writing activities were used to supplement the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. Writing activities were read in conjunction with the interview transcripts in order to get a more complete sense of each co-researcher.
Informants

The parents and/or guardians of two of the co-researchers served as informants to this study. One interview each was conducted with Sam's and Octavia's mothers. Octavia's mother worked as a training manager for a state agency. Sam's mother worked for the Cancer Data Research Services at Memorial Cancer Hospital. Each of these two interviews lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes. I had the opportunity to conduct the interview over lunch with Octavia's mother (Ms. Patricia). I met Sam's mother during her lunch break. Interview questions that were asked to each of the two mothers are in Appendix G. While I made several attempts to reach the mothers of Tynesha and Sara, it was not possible to conduct interviews. Tynesha offered to interview her mother for me and email me her mother's responses to the questions. I accepted her offer, as again, it was important to me that we collaborate as much as possible throughout the research process. However, her mother had a busy schedule and could not be interviewed. The purposes of the interviews with the mother's were: to gain an understanding of their mothers' experiences in physical activity, to learn who encouraged or discouraged the mother of the co-researchers to participate in physical activity, to engage in conversation about the mothers' views on availability of opportunities for their daughters to participate in physical activity, and to have each mother describe her daughter. I felt that the perspectives of the mothers could contribute to the study by providing an additional perspective on the experiences of the co-researchers' opportunities to be physically active. In addition, I wanted to learn about the physical activities in which each mother participated. I
wondered if there would be a relationship between active mothers and daughters in this study.

I was fortunate to observe and interview Reverend Thunder, the Youth Minister. Observations were conducted most Tuesdays that Bible Study met from April 2001 until April 2002. Reverend Thunder was an African American woman who served full time as the Minister of Ministry Development at Friend Church. She was actively involved in youth, women and church conferences as a preacher. She also acted as a workshop presenter, conference speaker and ministry consultant. I had the opportunity to observe Reverend Thunder’s interaction with the youth at the church since the spring of 2001. It was apparent through her exchanges with all of the youth that she had a relaxed and caring relationship with them. She often talked to the adolescent members of the church about issues such as safe sex, abstaining from drugs, and the importance of healthy eating habits.

The purpose of my interview with Reverend Thunder was to gain an understanding of Reverend Thunder’s perceptions of the role of the church in the lives of African Americans. Please see Appendix H for interview questions. Examples of the questions I posed to her included: How do you see the role of the church in the lives of the African American community as opposed to other communities? What is the view of Friend Church for appropriate roles for females? What is the church’s view of appropriate roles for women in sports?

I also interviewed one teacher for each of the four co-researchers to help gain an understanding of what each co-researcher was like in a school setting. When possible, the physical education teacher was interviewed, but in cases where the co-
researcher was not participating in physical education, I interviewed the teacher of the respective class I observed. I interviewed Sam’s and Octavia’s physical education teachers (Ms. Tandy and Mr. Matt) for 20 minutes each. The purposes of these interviews were to gain a basic understanding of what each teacher was trying to accomplish in their classes, to discover how the co-researcher compared to others in terms of skill and effort level in class, and to seek the teachers views with regard to increasing physical activity among African American females. Although the interview itself was short and provided me with a surface understanding of the information I sought, this was complimented with the 90-minute class observation. Interview questions that I asked Ms. Tandy and Mr. Matt can be found in Appendix I. Tynesha chose her orchestra class as the environment she wanted me to observe and thus I interviewed her orchestra instructor. Sara requested that I observe her Spanish class and interview her Spanish teacher. The questions I asked these two teachers centered on the co-researchers participation in their class in terms of academic performance and social interactions. Please see Appendix I for an outline of interview questions for Sara’s and Tynesha’s teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45 minutes each</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>3 X (4 co-researchers)</td>
<td>45 – 90 minutes each</td>
<td>12 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Observations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations at Dance Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 hours each</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations at Church for data collection</td>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>2 hours each</td>
<td>10-14 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations at Church for building rapport</td>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>2 hours each</td>
<td>30-36 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informants:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reverend Thunder Interview</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Octavia and Sam’s Mother’s Interviews</td>
<td>1 X (2)</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Data gathering methods and time.

Data Analysis

The audiotapes of all individual interviews with the co-researchers, teachers, parents and Youth Minister were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed. An inductive analysis (Patton, 1990) was used to determine common themes that emerged from the data. Specifically, data were analyzed using the constant comparative method as a means of developing grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Creswell (1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1994) described grounded theory as a method of using the data to generate theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that the purposes of grounded theory are to:

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(a) build rather than only test theory; (b) give the research process the rigor necessary to make the theory “good” science; (c) help the analyst to break through the biases and assumptions brought to, and that can develop during, the research process; (d) provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents (p. 57).

Grounded theory emphasizes the coding of data to generate a “core story” around which all the data are organized (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding allows the researcher to synthesize data, categorize the data, consider it, and conceptualize it in new ways (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

In order to generate grounded theory, I analyzed each case separately as well as conducted a cross case analysis. I determined emergent themes for each co-researcher by reading and coding the transcripts of the interviews and by reviewing journals and writing activities for each participant. This study used the individual cases of the four females to assist in learning about their experiences in and perceptions of sport, physical education and physical activity. Guided by the critical cultural perspective, I always examined how the intersection of race, class, and gender factored into the data.

I then used a cross case analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1998) to determine similar themes within each research question for the four cases. Huberman and Miles (1998) noted that the benefit of using a cross case analysis is that “multiple cases also identify configurations (of actors, of working arrangements, of casual influences) that hold in some settings and not in others” (p. 193). Specifically, for each research...
question I compared the themes that I found for each of the co-researchers. This resulted in the generation of additional themes. Where relevant, I also discussed disconfirming cases. Again, I considered the influence of race, class, and gender when analyzing the data across cases.

It is critical that each case tells its own story through the meanings held by the individuals within the case (Stake, 2000). As a researcher, it was necessary for me to be mindful of the extent to which my own experiences were involved in this project as well. It was imperative that I managed the tensions between making explicit my own standpoints and interpretive lens and allowing the individuals to tell their own stories.

Considerations to Enhance Trustworthiness of the Study

Rapport

The time spent at the research site over the past year and time spent with the co-researchers at the site, during interviews, and at the school contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In order to cultivate relationships, I spent time with the co-researchers at Friend Church prior to collecting data and between interviews. It was important to me that the co-researchers saw me as often as possible, not only on days of data collection.

Trustworthiness of Data

As with any qualitative study, establishing the credibility of data is critical. Creswell (1998) suggested that terms such as trustworthiness and authenticity be used when addressing the topic of credibility. Two criteria were used to establish trustworthiness: credibility and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
A credible study is one where the "constructed realities of the participants match the realities as represented by the researcher" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 286). The techniques that were used to ensure credibility were triangulation of methods, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing.

**Triangulation of Methods**

Triangulation of data involves using multiple perspectives to collect and analyze data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Glesne, 1999). The purpose of triangulation process is to judge the accuracy of the data and to explore different perceptions, rather than simply ensuring that all data and interpretations align. Data in this study were triangulated by using multiple individual interviews, focus group interviews, and writing activities. In addition, the use of a peer debriefer assisted in this process.

**Member Checks**

Member checks (Patton, 1990) were carried out in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to member checks as the "most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). The co-researchers were provided a summary of the information of their case. I initially shared the full transcript of the first individual interview with the participants for review. These were quite lengthy (average 30 pages for interview #1, average of 31 pages for interview #2, and average of 48 pages for interview #3). Due to the busy schedules of the co-researchers, they opted to wait and peruse a complete summary of their cases to verify if I was able to capture the meaning of the words they shared with me. However, I felt it important to check from interview to interview (and not wait until the end of the research), so I conducted what I refer to as "interview checks." Interview checks occurred when I reiterated to...
a co-researcher what they said in the previous interview, or asked if I was correct in
my interpretation, or asked them to elaborate on an issue, or asked them what they
meant by a particular statement. Once summaries of all four cases were written I
mailed each co-researcher a copy of her story. The letter specified that they were to
read the script to see if it was accurate and to see if they wanted anything
altered or taken out. I informed them that I would call them in one week to meet and
discuss the case, clarify any questions that arose, and verify that they agreed with the
themes that had emerged and that text the captured their words. I met with each co-
researcher for approximately thirty minutes and went through her case. The major
concern of three of the four co-researchers was the unnecessary words that they used.
For example, one researcher asked that I not insert the word “like” when they
repeated it several times in a quotation.

In addition to the member checks with the co-researchers, I provided copies of
interviews to Reverend Thunder, the teachers, and Sam and Octavia’s mothers. This
was done to ensure accuracy in transcribing and to be certain that I captured on tape
what these individuals had intended to say. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the
purpose of member checks is to allow the participants to suggest changes to improve
the authenticity of the data. None of the informants indicated that they had any
changes they wanted made to improve the accuracy of the transcripts.

Prolonged Engagement

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to prolonged engagement as the “investment of
sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for
misinformation introduced by distortions either of self or of the respondents, and
building trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). It is my hope that the twelve months spent with the co-researchers, although sporadic, helped develop rapport and trust, and helped minimize any distortions of data that could arise due to rare interactions.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing, which involves an outsider commenting on the process and outcome of the interpreted data, helps bring credibility to a study (Creswell, 1998). Peer debriefing allows for external reflection and commenting on your work (Creswell, 1998). The majority of the peer debriefing came from my faculty advisor at The Ohio State University. Throughout the study, I met weekly with my advisor to discuss concerns with the study. During data analysis and the final writing phases of the study, regular meetings were held with my academic advisor who challenged the methodologies and interpretations of the study. I also had meetings every two weeks with a doctoral student in a field outside of physical education but who was very familiar with qualitative research methods. This particular individual challenged my thinking on the types of questions I asked and why I asked them. She helped ensure that the themes that developed were relevant.

Transferability

Transferability allows for the reader of research to decide whether the results of the study apply to the context they are studying (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Transferability is achieved through thick description. It is imperative to use sufficient detail and depth in presenting the case to enable the reader to determine what part of the findings are transferable to their situation. I hoped that by using multiple sources
of data, and by probing throughout each piece of data, I was able to provide, thick, rich descriptions.

Researcher Bias

It is a critical aspect of qualitative research to expose the bias the primary researcher brings to the study (Glesne, 1999). I brought 27 years of experience in formal and informal physical activity to the study. In addition, although this is a large amount of physical activity, it has been limited to a monocultural setting. I recognized that my knowledge of physical activity is of a very limited culture and not a diverse group. It was therefore my role as a partner in this research project to learn about those who are different than myself and to accept this co-researcher role without letting any awkwardness I may have felt affect my reactions throughout the study.

An additional bias brought to the study is that I was a varsity Division 1 athlete, and I am a physical educator. Therefore, I value physical activity and the importance of it. As a researcher attempting to learn about the experiences and perceptions of my co-researchers, it was critical that I surrender my views of the importance of physical activity and a healthy lifestyle to myself, and not judge any of my participants for their participation in physical activity regardless of the frequency or intensity of their involvement.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance to me at all times throughout this study. All information that the co-researchers and informants shared with me was kept confidential, as were their names. The research was written in such a way as to mask the identity of those involved in the study. All participation in this
study was voluntary. Procedures regarding the voluntary nature of the study and the process for ensuring confidentiality were explicitly stated in the Statement of Informed Consent that each co-researcher signed (and had signed by a parent/guardian) as per The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board. Pseudonyms were used throughout the write up of this study.

In addition, it was very important to me that participants only impart information they felt comfortable sharing. It was my responsibility to spend sufficient time with the co-researchers discussing the voluntary nature of the study. However, I also encouraged the co-researchers to be honest with me at all times to help ensure quality research.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature and scope of involvement in physical activity for four African American females, to examine the co-researcher’s perceptions (positive, negative, or neutral) with regard to physical activity, to discover how physical activity functions in their lives, and to discover who or what are the sources of influence with regard to their beliefs about physical activity.

This chapter presents the findings for the four case studies. It begins with an elaboration of Friend Church and its importance in the lives of its members. The chapter then presents each case study beginning with an introduction of the co-researcher and followed by supporting themes that emerged for each of the four research questions.

Role of Friend Church in the Lives of the Co-Researchers

Prior to sharing the stories of Octavia, Sam, Tynesha, and Sara, it is necessary to set the backdrop of the study and describe the setting from which the co-researchers were selected and its possible impact on their lives. The site where I
obtained access to the co-researchers was at a large Baptist church in the Midwest. Friend Church is a large African American community with approximately 1,500 members in its congregation. Friend Christian Academy (grades k - 6) is housed within Friend Church.

The church is the central part of the lives of many of those who attend Friend Church. The Youth Minister, Reverend Thunder, described what the church means in the lives of many church-going African Americans:

The African American Church is the center of everything. We learn to cook, eat, dress, everything through the church. The church is the center. In the other cultures, the church is one aspect, but everything has been done through the church. The way we understand ourselves, the way we learn to live, the way we learn to breathe, the way we learn to act with other people. Without the church in the African American community, we would be dead. Literally. People come to the church to get edification, education, both. They want inspiration and they want knowledge. Through African American church you can um, register to vote, and you can get a good sermon, you get computer skills, you get everything, it's in the church in the African American church. (Reverend Thunder, 3-9-02)

As the acting Minister over all of the Church's youth oriented programs and activities, Reverend Thunder is involved in the lives of most of the youth who attend Friend Church. She acts as a role model for them and therefore it is important to this study to understand some of her personal beliefs pertaining to the youth under her guidance. While she encourages the youth to adhere to the church's expectations of its members (i.e. tithing, attending Sunday services, attending youth functions), she does not simply focus on church related material with them, but rather endeavors to teach the young members how to handle themselves and behave in a variety of places and cultural situations:
...we want to teach them how they can still talk like if they’re on the streets “what’s up homie”, you know, chillin out. And then can go to the White House and still be eloquent...So that’s what we try to do is equip them for every aspect and to show them that there’s more to life than McDonalds. ...build a dream in them...We have kids for the first time, who are going to college, and their parents have not gone to college, you know and that’s something new...So to teach the men how to be men and teach the women how to be women. (Reverend Thunder, 03-09-02)

Some of the topics Reverend Thunder discussed with the youth included: teen pregnancy, sex, and masturbation (Reverend Thunder, 03-09-02). Of particular importance to this study are the roles and expectations Friend Church designates as appropriate for women. According to Reverend Thunder, “…at [Friend Church,] a women can be anything...there’s no limitation placed on them” (Reverend Thunder, 03-09-02). Pointing to herself as an example, she said:

...I do everything. I baptize, I do everything, I preach, I do everything...I can be married, pastor, have a child, I don’t have to give up my career and I think that’s what fascinates my young folks about me. Is that I’m career oriented...I’m the youngest person on staff. I’m the youngest person they ever had. It just blows their mind. (Reverend Thunder, 03-09-02)

Reverend Thunder warned, however, that while the Church itself places no limits on women, obstacles do exist. Older members of the both the church and African American communities continue to maintain the mindset that women should take an inferior position to men, that in order to be valuable, women should be “barefoot and pregnant” (Reverend Thunder 03-09-02).

Reverend Thunder indicated that in the efforts of the church to meet all the needs of its congregation, the church leaders recognized the necessity of a program addressing the importance of exercise, healthy eating, and healthy living. For over a year Friend Church has been providing healthy meals for its members, offering
aerobics classes, and educating the congregation on health issues such as, high blood pressure, diabetes, and HIV. Yet, Reverend Thunder explained that despite the efforts of the church, many members, even the youth, are inactive. She attributed this to lack of time and money:

...if you keep dropping your child over at McDonald's or Wendy's to eat fast food every week and every night...because of poor time...but at the same time, what is valuable to you, because our young folks are dying faster, they're getting sick faster, their bones are not that strong and they can't fend for themselves. A lot of our young people eat poorly because their parents, eat poorly and they can't afford to eat healthy. That healthy stuff is expensive. (Reverend Thunder, 03-09-02)

Reverend Thunder thinks that a healthy lifestyle is important for everyone, not just for women, but she recognizes that her female youth are less active than her male youth and therefore need more motivation and support to maintain good health (Reverend Thunder, 03-09-02).

Because of her close involvement with the youth and her status among them, Reverend Thunder selected those adolescent females from her youth group she thought would be the most honest and reliable, and therefore, most beneficial to this collaborative research project. When elaborating on how she picked the adolescents, Reverend Thunder stated:

Well, I call them my ace boon cumbs... Yeah, that means they're very settled, they're stable, um, they're creative, they have a whole lot of energy, they speak their mind, that kind of stuff... If you want somebody to tell you honestly if you look good in that, those are the girls you go to... So, that's basically. Um, and their parents, are very understanding and I thought that they would at least help you, and they're least resistant of folks from other culture and other color. (Reverend Thunder 03-09-02)
She wanted the people she chose as co-researchers to take their role as such seriously and clearly took care in making the decision in order to generate as much accurate information as possible.

I will now present each case study for the four co-researchers.

Case One: Octavia

As part of the first writing activity, Octavia (aged 15 years) described herself as: goofy, nice, truthful, keeps it real, and thoughtful. Physically, she described herself as being 5 feet six inches tall with a medium to large build compared to other ninth grade girls. Octavia was adopted as a baby and has an older sister and an older brother, neither of whom were adopted or still reside with Octavia and her mother, Ms. Patricia. Ms. Patricia completed an undergraduate degree and a Master’s degree and was employed as a training manager for a state agency. Ms. Patricia has always been a working single mother to her three children. Octavia has a grandmother who lives in the same city as Octavia. Octavia describes her family’s socioeconomic status as middle class.

Although, Octavia and her sister do not live together, they are very close and spend time with each other almost daily. Some of the time Octavia shares with her family is at Friend Church where they are members. Octavia participates in the dance program, Youth Group and Sunday morning services. She spends five to seven hours a week at church.

Octavia attends Rose Hgh School. It is a mid-west public high school with an enrollment of 685 students. Twenty-five percent of the school was on free and reduced lunch at the time of the study. The school consists of approximately 74%
African American students, 20% White and non-minority students, 5% Asians students, and less than 1% Spanish and American Indian students. Octavia did not have a favorite class or teacher at the time of the study. However, she did say that her best class is Biology or Spanish. Octavia receives mostly B's in school. Outside of school, Octavia enjoys playing video games and listening to Rhythm and Blues, Hip Hop, Rap, and Gospel music.

Involvement in Physical Activity

Octavia defined physical activity as, “a form of exercise, and any sport is physical activity” (First Writing Activity). Octavia participates in Junior Varsity softball at Rose High School and in the dance program at Friend Church. Octavia was participating in physical education at her school during the time of this study. Octavia first became involved in formal physical activity at the age of five when she joined tap and ballet. She followed this with cheerleading in the third grade, and drill team in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. She then was a part of her seventh grade basketball team, and seventh and eighth grade track team. At the time of the study, Octavia was attending the pre-practices for the Rose High School softball team and eventually played both junior varsity and varsity softball. Her close friend, Fonda, was on the team with her. In her free time, Octavia rides bikes with her friend Armstrong and plays basketball with her friend Swoops. Octavia estimates that she commits two hours a week to the church dance program, ten hours weekly to softball, and a couple of hours to informal activity. All together, Octavia devotes approximately fifteen hours a week to her present physical activity involvement.
Perceptions of Physical Activity

Four key themes emerged related to Octavia’s perceptions of physical activity. Octavia perceived physical activity positively as an important part of a healthy lifestyle. She also associated three negatives with physical activity: enervating as opposed to energizing, something unstructured, and a hindrance to her social life.

Physical Activity as An Important Part of Maintaining A Healthy Lifestyle

Octavia believes physical activity constitutes an important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. She thinks participation in physical activity is necessary because “you gotta stay healthy” (Octavia, 02-13-02). Octavia also speaks to the benefits of physical activity as being; “like you’re in more shape, like you can do more things without I don’t know you’re just more you’re in more shape” (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia had a general understanding that a fit body is healthier than an unfit one, and that physical activity can help a person achieve fitness. Octavia demonstrated her knowledge of the connection between being in shape and physical activity when she discussed the activities of her younger cousin. “I can’t stand to see her in here just watching Cartoon Network all day. Cause first of all I don’t like those shows, and I just want her to get out” (Octavia, .2-13-02).

Octavia believed physical activity is helpful in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and distinguishes between being fat and being fit, saying:

…I know some real, real big people that are in shape. I know some real, real skinny people that are out of shape. Some people try to characterize you like…if you’re skinny, then you don’t need to do anything, you’re in shape, or if you’re fat, you need to do something, but I’m just out of shape…(Octavia, 03-14-02)
Octavia realizes that although she is smaller in size than her sister, she is not as fit, and therefore is exhausted by a level of exercise her sister can easily endure. Her description of her older sister as, “bigger than me, but . . . healthier than me” (Octavia, 02-13-02), illustrates this distinction. When discussing the experience of riding bikes with her sister, Octavia refers to her sibling as, “…going all super fast and I’ll be out of breath” (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia’s ability to detect the subtle line between fat and fit was further demonstrated by data gathered during the third interview when I shared pictures of people with Octavia (All African American and one Asian woman) possessed of varying levels of muscularity. The first several pictures I showed her were of professional body builders. Then, I presented one picture of a woman who was thin and toned. The final picture I displayed was of several African American women, neither extremely muscular or extremely thin, working out at the same time (doing some type of aerobic activity). I asked Octavia which photograph she thought was the most realistic. She replied by saying “people in this picture with other people exercising” (Octavia, 03-14-02). She indicated that this picture represented the most acceptable body type and that if people her age saw the picture they would say, “I wanna be like that” (Octavia, 03-14-02). Octavia commented that she would like to look like those women also.

Octavia perceives physical activity as a method of maintaining a healthy weight. She also realizes that fluctuations in physical activity levels can cause
fluctuations in weight: “…over the summer, I just blew up. I just got real big, cause I wasn’t active over the summer, that’s why” (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia views her weight gain as a direct result of decreasing her level of physical activity. She also believes her mother’s weight gain over time has resulted from a similar decrease in physical activity:

…when she was younger, she used to be real skinny, like real, real skinny…I don’t know where she got big at, but somewhere, I don’t know, I guess as you get older you…And I guess she’s not as on the go. She doesn’t have to do many things. It’s not like she has to do a lot. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Statements made by Octavia’s mother, Ms. Patricia, support Octavia’s perception that her mother has gained weight due to a less active lifestyle:

Um, I have a treadmill at home, and when I think of it, and have the desire, I go down and do that…but not a lot. As I’ve gotten older, It’s diminished. Um, just haven’t had the inclination. You know, working and coming home and having some dinner with my mom…some of the stress of being a caregiver, um, just kind of takes out of you so when I come home, I just kind of vegetate on the couch…as a result, I have gained a tremendous amount of weight. (Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02)

Octavia’s personal experiences with the way in which changes in her physical activity level have affected her weight, as well as the experiences of her mother, have affected her ideas about how people could be encouraged to be more physically active. When I asked Octavia what she thinks could persuade girls to be more active, she said:

Role Models…like at our age, everybody wants a singer or something like that, or a actor or something but if they really knew what they did, then I think they would try it. But all they see is them act or sing so they try to sing or act. But on a everyday, they, they workout and do all that and they probably just don’t think about that. If they knew what they did, I think they would try to do that. (Octavia, 03-14-02)
Octavia realizes that many of the role models influencing today’s youth work out in order to remain fit. She feels that if young people thought about the daily workout routines many role models go through, perhaps when they mimic the behavior of famous people, they would include exercise.

_Enervating as Opposed to Energizing_

Octavia’s participation in structured physical activities, either through physical education class or organized sports, results in her feeling tired and drained. But, unlike many people who are physically active, Octavia does not find organized physical activity rewarding insofar as it pertains to physical exertion. During a discussion about basketball she states, “…a lot of my friends play basketball…and I played basketball too, but it got tiring” (Octavia, 01-30-02). Octavia quit participating in organized basketball due mostly to the fact that it made her tired.

Octavia’s physical education class is less than 45 minutes in duration. Though this time frame is typical for a physical education class, it is a much shorter period of time than an ordinary practice for most organized sports. Yet, Octavia expresses dissatisfaction with the level of physical intensity in physical education.

…My mom says,… just don’t do anything I mean be active, but don’t really…I’m like “Mom!!” But I try, I mean I like it so I try to participate a whole lot but if I get like real, real into it then I start sweating. (Octavia, 02-13-02)

Octavia is hesitant to subject herself to some of the normal consequences of physical activity such as sweating.

Octavia’s perception that physical activity is enervating applies to organized physical activities in which she currently chooses to participate. Octavia’s description
of her first softball practice reveals a strong displeasure for the way exercise makes her feel.

Like the first time we had to... there's this big parking lot that we practice on and you run around it one time, and the one time I felt like I was gonna pass out. And you just know when everybody else is just standing there like, "Okay". You're like (breathing hard)...like that then something's wrong and you're out of shape. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Even dance caused Octavia to complain of tiredness, despite assertions that it is her favorite physical activity (Octavia, 01-30-02).

*Physical Activity Should Be Structured, and it is Not Presently In her Life, Leading to Feelings of Frustration*

Octavia values structure and accountability in physical activity, especially organized physical activity. Her description of the other students in her physical education class indicates disapproval of those who do not follow the rules:

I mean, they probably slack on it, like we’re supposed to do two laps and do 24 sit ups and 24 push ups and then do your stretches or whatever...Some people will since you’re supposed to do the two laps, they only do one and he doesn’t really catch them and like when they turn they don’t do their stretches and stuff, but during when we play...Like we’re playing volleyball this week and some people if it comes their way, they just stand there and look at it (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Octavia expresses her condemnation of the other students by utilizing the negative connotation of the term “slack”. She sets herself apart from other students using the pronoun “they” and never “we”.

Octavia’s preference for structured physical activity is also demonstrated by her aggravation with the disorganization of the dance program at Friend Church. She stated that she does not always enjoy attending dance practice because:
...I thought that would be better for me to get a closer relationship to God. But it’s not working...people there, they just play too much and it’s not organized. And...we never perform, and when we do perform, we look a mess, and it just doesn’t help me for what I need to do and stuff like that. (Octavia, 3-14-02)

Octavia does not want simply to fool around and waste time. She cannot fulfill her purposes for participating in the dance program if no one takes the physical activity of dance seriously. Her disapproval of the lack of organization within the dance program can even be classified as anger:

That dance that she made up, that was so ugly, and I just didn’t like the dance, the people were playing too much...And then she like gets mad cause people play and I agree with her. If they don’t want to be there, leave...I ask people like why are you here? And then they’ll say "well my mom makes me". Well, your mom needs to let you leave because it just it is not organized and that makes me so mad. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Octavia is adamant about the need for structure within the dance program. She feels that people who are not enthusiastic about their commitment to dance add to the disorganization of the program and should refrain from participating. Octavia states unequivocally that she would enjoy dance more if it was more structured (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Perceives Further Involvement In Physical Activity As a Hindrance to Her Social Life

Octavia frequently implies that too much physical activity inhibits her social life:

Well...my friend Swoops, she does everything...She does every sport and...she can’t come over to my house and stuff like we used to cause she’s got practice and...practice is everyday except for Sunday, and then that’s because she’s so tired, she doesn’t go to church on Sunday’s and then it starts right back up. So she really doesn’t have nothing, like when we go to the games, she has a game to play in so she can’t go to the games. (Octavia, 02-13-02)
Octavia values having time to devote to non-physical activities, such as going to friends’ houses, church, and attending sporting events. She views Swoops’ inability to do these things as a negative aspect of her friend’s life. She is hesitant to add new physical activities to her schedule, as it might further hinder her social life. For instance, Octavia helps with her high school’s drill team because of her knowledge about competitions, but is reluctant to commit time on a daily basis. She stated that, since it is her freshman year, she’d rather wait and see how different activities work (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia does not want participation in physical activities to interfere with her ability to socialize among friends. When asked what would cause her to be inactive, she answered, “Making friends, keeping friends, that would cause me not to” (Octavia, 02-13-02). Even though Octavia’s statement also indicates that she recognizes physical activity as a way to make new friends, she views this as more of a disadvantage if it means she will only meet people who’s first priority is sports:

... I’m trying to get out of the sports kind of, not get out of it, but not be so much on it. If I meet people that’s on the sports team, that’s all, I’m afraid that’s all they’re gonna talk about, and I want to get out more. (Octavia, 02-13-02)

Octavia thinks that people whose lives revolve around sports are missing out on other fun things in life. In a discussion with Octavia regarding why she is now less active in sports than as a child, she explained, “I saw how much I was missing...Like just going out and having fun” (Octavia, 02-13-02). The word “fun” is used as an opposite to physical activity. Involvement in sports was causing Octavia to miss out on “fun”. As a result, she became less active in organized sports. Octavia does not
exclude physical activity from her life entirely, nor does she permit it to interfere with other social possibilities.

In summary, Octavia has four key perceptions of physical activity: physical activity as enervating as opposed to energizing, physical activity as something that ought to be structured, physical activity as a hindrance to her social life, and physical activity as an important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. She reiterated these perceptions time after time during her interviews.

Sources Influencing Beliefs About Physical Activity

Octavia draws upon two main sources to describe her beliefs about physical activity: her family (mother, sister and brother) and her friends (Swoops, Armstrong and Fonda). When asked whether school, the church, or the media influenced her, she responded “no” (Octavia, 03-23-02).

Family

Ms. Patricia describes her daughter as: wonderful, bright, creative, loving, has a mind of her own, likeable, social and a great kid (Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02). She also believes that Octavia has “a lot of potential. I sometimes think she doesn’t realize or see the potential, but it’s there” (Ms. Patricia 03-15-02).

Octavia’s mother was active as a child, though almost all of her exercise was informal in nature. She remembers fondly the time she and her friends spent playing games on the school playground:
...I spent all my time at the playground. Um, always, we lived at the playground so we did hopscotch, we did tetherball, we did kickball, we did everything...I remember running and being so hot, the heat would be radiating off of us (Ms. Patricia is concentrating on remembering and feeling now...her eyes are closed and she is smiling)...and we would be playing you know, Simon Says and all kids of good things, so really, really very, very active...
(Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02)

Ms. Patricia enjoyed being active with her friends. They didn’t think of their games as physical activity, but rather as “just playing and having a good time” (Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02).

Octavia’s mother doesn’t remember disliking physical activity until it became more formal in junior high and high school physical education, which she claims, “wasn’t a really great experience because [she] was always the chubby kid and [they] had to wear those shorts” (Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02). Octavia’s mother thought that physical education “wasn’t that significant” (Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02) when she was in school. She rarely discussed physical education or physical activity with her daughter (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Despite how little they discuss physical activity, one of the ways Octavia’s mother shapes her views on this subject is by showing serious concern about the possible occurrence of injury. When I asked Octavia if her mother thinks physical activity is important, Octavia answered: “I don’t, we don’t really talk about it...When I used to want to play football, she used to say “no” all the time. And...I wanted to play softball this year too and she said ‘no’” (Octavia, 02-13-02). I then asked if this meant she was not going to play softball and she responded: “...she said I can but she said that she has to sit in on some of the practices or something, something dumb...She’s old...she’s worried about...me getting hurt or something”
Octavia’s mother feels it necessary to observe Octavia’s softball practices in order to assess the risks involved. Octavia alludes to the fact that part of her mother’s fear results from being a member of an older generation.

The concern of Octavia’s mother regarding physical safety extends beyond the fields of organized sport and into the gymnasium in physical education class. The possibility of injury is the only aspect of Octavia’s physical education class her mother discusses (Octavia, 02-13-02). In reference to her mother’s comments about physical education class, Octavia states “[she] always tells me to be careful and stuff” (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia’s family and friends have suffered various injuries. Octavia’s uncle, a football player in the NFL, sat out last season due to back and shoulder injuries; her friend Swoops has knee problems severe enough to require medical attention; another friend, Stephanie, as well as Octavia’s sister have both experienced broken arms. Octavia herself has never suffered a serious injury and wonders why her mother worries so much about her safety (Octavia, 03-14-02). The only specific concern of her mother’s Octavia can think of regards her teeth:

I know she worries about my teeth so much. Well I used to have braces,…so she, she worries. She’s like “we need to buy you another mouth guard” and I have…80 million mouthguards, one for every sport, and she wants me to buy another one for softball, a different kind. If I’m catcher, they have the whole suit. She’s still like ‘just to be on the safe side’. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Octavia finds her mother’s desire for her to wear a mouth guard in addition to the catcher’s faceplate extreme.

Octavia’s mother encourages her to participate in dance, cheerleading and drill team (Octavia, 02-13-02). These activities involve very little physical contact,
and therefore a smaller risk of injury. Octavia mentioned that her mother didn’t want her to play football when she was younger because it was a “boys sport”. I asked Octavia if she knew what other sports her mom thinks are for boys and what sports she considers for girls. Octavia replied:

Definitely football for boys sports, baseball is a boys sport, she thinks hockey is a boys sport. Anything you could really, really, get hurt in, like wrestling stuff like that, but the little feminine, she thinks like tennis. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

According to Octavia, her mother views some sports as too injury prone for girls and thinks female athletes should play more traditionally feminine sports.

Even though Octavia believes that her mother’s anxiety about injury is excessive, she is influenced by it. In her physical education class, Octavia noticed that some of the other students received injuries. She remarked; “It’s [physical education] fun, but a lot of people have been getting hurt…” (Octavia, 01-30-02). Octavia uses the qualifying word “but” to indicate that the risk of injury takes away from the “fun” of physical education class. When I asked Octavia what she thought would cause her to be inactive, her answer was cut and dry; “[getting] injured that would cause me not to” (Octavia, 02-13-02). She finds the possibility of injury disconcerting.

Octavia’s fear of injury extends past her own personal experiences with physical activity to include those of her friends. Octavia is concerned about possible injuries to her friend Swoops:

She worries me to death…She’s a freshman on Varsity (Octavia, 02-13-02)…I do worry about her like when she plays all those sports,…cause right now, she had to go to the doctor’s office two days ago for her knee…That’s already starting so. So, this is only 9th grade, by 12th, she’s gonna have real bad problems (Octavia, 03-14-02).
The phrase “she worries me to death” reveals not just mild concern for her friend, but fear that she may be hurt through her involvement in sports. Some of this fear arises from Octavia’s belief that Swoops is doing long term damage to her body.

In addition to influencing Octavia’s perceptions about injury, her mother guides her views on what makes up a healthy diet. Octavia explains that her mother won’t allow her to eat certain foods:

My mom has me on this thing where I can’t get no fries, from anywhere, like french fries. And she said every time I get. And I have to get chicken or something...Or if I do, it would be once a week and they have to be small fries...Every once in a while, like if I beg her, she’ll just [say] “alright”. But um, and like now at home, we’ve been having a lot of chicken Caesar salads. And I think I’ll keep doing that cause it’s good and it’s healthy. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Despite Octavia’s disgruntled comments about having to “beg her mother for french fries”, she values her mother’s views enough to keep eating according to her mother’s rules because “it’s good and it’s healthy”.

Octavia takes her mother’s ideas about healthy eating at face value. For instance, she stated that she is trying to cut down on the amount of red meat she eats:

...on the holiday’s like Easter, it’s always a tradition in my family we have lamb, and like Christmas we have some like chicken or something...and Thanksgiving of course everyone has Turkey and stuff. And... I don’t know, I always cut down on the red meat...(Octavia, 03-14-02)

When I asked if her mother had told her red meat is unhealthy, she responded, “Mmmhmm, yes she did. And she said that I need to stop eating all the fried stuff and all the stuff that just doesn’t help me at all” (Octavia, 03-14-02). I asked if her mother gave her a reason for cutting back on that stuff. Octavia answered, “No, she just says
it's unhealthy” (Octavia, 03-14-02). Octavia doesn’t question the information she receives from her mother regarding diet.

Octavia’s regard for her mother’s opinion is also illustrated by the fact that she reacts differently to her mother’s criticism than to criticism from others. When her health instructor told her she was fat in front of the softball team, Octavia was offended. When her mother agreed with what the teacher had said, however, Octavia thought her mother was being helpful.

And she said. Like this one day my health instructor at my school just told me, we were stretching in the weight room and doing all this stuff in the weight room and she told me I was fat and I was real mad and I told my mom and she said, she’ll say, “that’s why they say you’re fat cause you eat all those fries”….it’s not like she was being mean or anything, she sees that that’s where my weak spot is….she say’s if that’s why they’re saying that then I know, she’ll know that I’ll stop eating the fries. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Another area in which Octavia’s mother influences her beliefs about physical activity is in the fulfillment of gender roles. Octavia’s mother is hesitant in her support of some of Octavia’s sport activities. According to Octavia, her mother’s encouragement is conditional:

It depends on, if she likes it, she is but if I like it and she doesn’t then it’s kind of hard for her to get….I mean she’ll support me in anything I do, but she just won’t….I don’t know, you know? (Octavia, 02-13-02)

Octavia struggles with understanding exactly why her mother doesn’t like some of her physical activities. Although her mother allows her to participate in the sports she chooses, with the exception of football, and even though both Octavia and her mother mentioned practicing softball together (Octavia, 03-14,02; and Ms. Patricia, 03-15-02), Octavia detects that there is still an element of disapproval in her mother’s attitude. Even with dance, one of the activities her mother approves of
Octavia feels her mother's interest is more critical than truly supportive:

...she comes and watches me but...I told her to come to my practice sometime just so she could see what we do and I asked her how it was and she was just saying bad stuff like “like well you need to do this and Shire needs to go slower and”... (Octavia, 02-13-02)

Octavia’s perception is that her mother doesn’t express any pleasure in seeing her daughter participate in physical activity.

Octavia perceives a difference between the way her mother supports her and the way in which she supported her brother. Octavia stated, that even though her brother didn’t live with them when she was young, her mother was still supportive of his physical activities (Octavia, 02-13-02). According to Octavia, her mother would not have objected to her brother participating in a girl-specific sport. When I asked Octavia if she thought her mother would support her brother in ballet or dance if it would help him with football, Octavia responded, “Yeah, cause it would help him” (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Octavia’s mother is the only constant influence in her life. The constancy of her mother’s influence is evidenced by the fact that if she were to make changes in her diet she would have to do so either with or under the guidance of her mother; “I’ll have to cause I wont’ be with nobody else” (Octavia, 03-14-02). Furthermore, Octavia prefers her mother’s support above that of her friends. She said that she would want both her friends and her mother at her game, but she needs her mother there: “…I need my mom there, but...if my friends were there, or if they were, it would be nice if they were, but if they weren’t, I wouldn’t be mad or sad” (Octavia,
3-14-02). She spoke of how looking up and seeing her mother in the stands would make her feel good because, “it’s like my mom’s up there” (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Octavia is exposed to many other people and institutions through her daily activities but does not regard the direction they offer her with the same intensity as the direction of her mother. When Octavia was asked to prioritize the influences in her life. She responded, “…my mom would come first” (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Octavia’s sister also has an influence in her life, and even somewhat on her views of physical activity, but not to the extent of her mother. Her sister is 20 years old and is very active, frequenting a local gym. Octavia and her sister live close by and see one another daily. Octavia values her sister’s opinions on life in general (Octavia, 02-13-02). She views her sister as someone to compare herself with and someone to look up to. For instance, Octavia describes her sister as being bigger than she is, but healthier (Octavia, 02-13-02). She also realizes that physical activity is important to her sister and that some of their time together requires her participation in physical activity. This is evidenced by Octavia’s realization that, although she and her sister would probably never engage in any type of formal physical activity together, she would be more “on the go” (Octavia, 02-13-02) if she spent more time with her sister.

Of Octavia’s family members, her brother is the least influential due to the fact that he has spent the least amount of time with her. She looked up to him and admired him for playing “every sport in the book and being good at them all too” (Octavia, 01-30-02). Her regard for him led her to want to play football despite her mother’s views on appropriate gender roles.
Friends

Octavia believes her friends would describe her as: funny/goofy, nice/kind, caring, emotional and opinionated (First Writing Activity). Octavia primarily draws upon three friends (Swoops, Armstrong and Fonda) for support about physical activity. She described these people as her “…three best friends at [her] school” (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia’s friend Swoops has been a source of information on physical activity by offering encouragement and advice on the importance of a healthy lifestyle. She said that of all the people in her life, Swoops encourages her the most to be physically active. Swoops teaches Octavia about the importance of a healthy lifestyle through the suggestions she makes about nutrition.

Every time like I get so mad at her at school cause . . . we got vending machines. . . I’ll get pop and she’ll say ‘can I have a sip’ And she’ll take a sip and she’ll throw it away . . . And I would get so mad. And she’ll be like ‘ou don’t need all this sugar, it just retains water’ . . . if I buy a Snickers, she’ll throw it away like ‘o you see all this fat in here, you don’t need it’ . . I’ll be in the snack line cause all they sell is pizza’s in there and she’ll move me to the last line like ‘this is where you need to be, look at this good salad’. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Octavia is not offended by Swoops’ comments about the food she eats, claiming that it assists her in managing her eating habits (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Swoops also does what she can to encourage Octavia’s participation in sports, which she views as helpful and good-natured:

…the track people and the softball people, they kind of practice next to each other, and I’ll be running my laps and she’ll be like “come on, put a hustle on that” or something, she’ll say “you’re being so lazy”…She’ll just say something. Always telling me something to know. (Octavia, 03-14-02)
Octavia’s friend Fonda also provides guidance in maintaining a healthy lifestyle:

...Well Fonda, she’s just so fit, I just watch her and I’ll, cause she...just does everything. ...with her mom. So if I just watch her, I’ll just. Cause she doesn’t really care, cause she eats, real a lot too, but she works it all off. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Although Octavia and Fonda do not engage in conversations about healthy lifestyles, Fonda’s actions provide a good model on which Octavia can base her own behavior:

“Yeah, I just watch her and just learn from that. She doesn’t really, she’s the kind of person that, she doesn’t believe in...telling people...what they need to do, cause some people, you know what I’m saying” (Octavia, 03-14-02).

Octavia’s friend Armstrong, although less influential, still offers his information about physical activity:

And Armstrong, he tells me when we have to lift weights, he tells me I shouldn’t do it everyday, cause he says it’s not healthy and he says I need to pick the days. Like he does it Monday, Wednesday and Friday’s...(Octavia, 03-14-02)

Armstrong has been educated on proper weight lifting techniques and Octavia values his knowledge and applies it to her weight lifting requirements for softball.

All three of her friends are very committed to fitness and organized sport, a characteristic Octavia admires in them. They also positively influence Octavia with regard to physical activity.

In summary Octavia’s beliefs about physical activity have been influenced primarily by her family and friends. They motivate her to be active, and advise her as to what steps she needs to take to be fit and healthy. Almost everything Octavia

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thinks or believes about physical activity stems from the influence of these two sources.

The Function of Physical Activity

In Octavia’s Life physical activity functions in these ways: fulfills a school requirement, plays a social function, and serves as a venue for fulfillment of clearly prescribed gender roles.

Venue to Fulfill Physical Education Requirement

Octavia must participate in physical education class. From an academic perspective, Octavia recognizes that participation in physical education is important but she is not enthusiastic about it. She dresses out daily for physical education, but does not strive for extra points. Octavia offered this explanation of the point system in her physical education class: “We get more points for participating and you have to dress and you get extra points if you wear Rose High School t-shirts” (Octavia, 01-30-02). The requirements are very clear and easily met, yet Octavia’s demonstrates a lack of motivation to go above and beyond the minimum standards by her statement that she only “sometimes” wears the Rose High School t-shirts (Octavia, 01-30-02).

Octavia’s physical education instructor, Mr. Matt, agrees that Octavia is not an overachiever in his class, but does enough to get by; “…she doesn’t stand out, you know as far as being super active, but she’s not inactive either…” (Mr. Matt, 03-15-02). Octavia is content with participating enough to protect her grade, but does not work towards accumulating extra points in physical education.

The fact that Octavia’s physical education class meets early in the day is a source of annoyance to her; “The only thing I hate about it is that I have it first period
and then the rest of the day I gotta walk around” (Octavia, 01-30-02). Octavia is frustrated, not so much by having to exert herself, but by having to do so early in the day, and thus having to feel sweaty and dirty for the remainder of her classes. Looking and feeling clean is important to Octavia, as evidenced by her comment that “over the weekend” she and her mother “went and got some stuff like baby wipes and extra deodorant and all that stuff” (Octavia, 01-30-02).

 Despite Octavia’s dissatisfaction with the early start of physical education, she values her grade and always tries to participate. She speaks negatively about those who fail to participate in physical education class. She informed me that the teacher, Mr. Matt, requires participation during warm-ups or he sends the students out of class (Octavia, 03-14-02). Octavia used the terms “slack” and “feminine” to describe her classmates. The term “slack” was used in reference to boys who did not participate and the term “feminine” described the girls who were not active. By using the negative term “slack” to describe the effort of those students who attempt to get away with doing less than Mr. Matt asks of them, Octavia expresses disapproval with their low level of participation. Furthermore, the description at the end of the quote regarding students who simply stand there when the ball comes their way, illustrates more than mere unwillingness to participate.

 Yet, despite Octavia’s censure of the behavior of her peers who do not participate, she still thinks of physical education as a requirement. When asked if she believes that physical education is important, she replied, “Gotta get the grade” (Octavia, 02-13-02). Octavia’s primary goal regarding physical activity in her
physical education class is to do enough to fulfill the physical education requirement imposed by her high school.

Despite Octavia’s stated enjoyment of physical education and her clear understanding that participating is academically important, there was no evidence that she has been specifically educated on the importance of physical activity. For example, she was not at all familiar with the National Guidelines for Physical Activity. When asked if she knew about the notion of “Commit to be Fit”, a city wide initiative to develop healthy, fit citizens, she said that she had heard of it, but had not paid attention to what it was (Octavia, 03-14-02). Octavia could not hazard a guess as to what might constitute a healthy lifestyle or a commitment to fitness. Octavia’s reply “nothing” to my question about what she has learned in school regarding healthy lifestyles constitutes the most illustrative example of this point (Octavia, 03-14-02). I continued by asking her if she thought this was something she would learn later in school in her health class, she stated: “I mean, they taught me a little something like when we was in middle school like 6th grade about brushing your teeth and stuff like that, but not really on physical activity or anything”. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Octavia seemed to know very little about healthy eating and the costs associated with it:

...all the red meats and stuff, I know stuff [is] real expensive, but if you eat...fruits and stuff, and just chicken and stuff, I don’t think it would cost more. But then again, I don’t go grocery shopping so I really don’t know. (Octavia, 03-14-02)
Octavia gained her knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet from her mother as opposed to a professional health or physical education instructor. In fact, the messages that Octavia has received from the Varsity softball coach, who is a health instructor at Rose High School, demonstrate a low level of awareness on appropriate methods of educating teenage females with regard to achieving a healthy lifestyle. One of Octavia’s coaches called her “fat” in the presence of the softball team:

Yeah, because it’s my coach and she was...the Varsity coach then I moved. That’s why I didn’t like her. Cause we were in there and we were doing this exercise where you lay on the floor and the person above you stands up and pushes your feet down...And then I was going real slow. It was hard to me. I mean, I was going real slow, I mean I was doing it, but I was going slow, and I think we should be able to go at our own pace. It was only like the second week or something. She’s like “let’s go, let’s go”. She’s like something something “your fat, you need to get”. She’s like “you’re just”. And then everybody else had to do stuff for their arms. She’s like “no you keep working on your stomach”. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

The instructor seemed to draw on being overweight to motivate Octavia to work harder on what she perceived as a “weak” part of Octavia’s body. Octavia proceeded to explain how this comment left her feeling:

I felt bad, but I just said well maybe that’s the truth. But then I thought...maybe if that’s how other people look at me, then that’s just how it is. But I didn’t, I kind of cared, but I kind of didn’t...Yeah. I mean, she’s lucky it was me and not anybody else. Cause...some other people at my school, it depends on who you do [it to]...Some people would have went off and would have cussed her out. Some people would have been really emotional and just started crying. But me, I’m really emotional, but I’d never show [it]. (Octavia, 3-14-02)

*Plays a Social Role*

The people Octavia spends her time with are physically active. Her three best friends Swoops, Armstrong and Fonda all participate in organized sport and engage in
regular vigorous physical activity. Octavia likes to use physical activity as a means of participating in the lives and interests of her friends. She noted that sharing physical experiences with others makes those experiences much more worthwhile: "...I don't like that sport [softball] a lot, but I just like my coach and the people...so that makes a difference" (Octavia, 01-30-02).

Octavia’s involvement in the dance program and Friend Church, the only other non-scholastic organized physical activity in which she regularly participates, is mostly because of her friends. Octavia stated that she does not want to attend church services and programs (Octavia, 02-13-02), but “[likes] the dance...cause [her] teacher’s nice and [her] friends are in it” (Octavia, 02-13-02).

Octavia enjoys physical activity as part of a team or group of people. She also likes to join in physical activity with individual friends outside of both school and organized physical engagements. Octavia mentions playing basketball with her friend Swoops (Octavia, 02-13-02), riding bikes with her friend Armstrong (Octavia, 03-14-02), and playing softball with her friend Fonda (Octavia, 03-14-02). In addition, I asked if it would ever occur to Octavia to do something physically active in her free time. She responded affirmatively, saying, “Yup, I do stuff with my friends, like I don’t know, just doing physical activity,...cause it’s fun” (Octavia, 03-14-02). Octavia’s relation of fun to “stuff with [her] friends” instead of a particular sport or activity indicates that it is the social aspect of being with friends that creates the element of fun and not necessarily the physical activities themselves.

Octavia’s sense of self, as well as her interests have changed over time and depend largely on what her peers think and the activities in which they participate:
...when I was real, real little, I used to be real girly and then like as I got older and like all my peers and stuff, they were all playing football and stuff and I liked that so then I just started doing that, and then I liked that more but that was...a little stage. And then,...I would say 6th grade, or so I um, that was I first got to middle school and I met new people and they were all girls and stuff so then. I don’t know, but I didn’t ever change for anybody. I just changed for myself...As I got older, I got more out of the boys. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Another way Octavia displays enthusiasm for physical activity in her life is by recognizing sports activities as a means of meeting new people. When I asked Octavia if she would continue to participate in dance if it was in a different setting with new people, and she responded, “Yup. Cause every time you join into something, a new dance, then you got to do it with different people, that’s how you meet new people I guess” (Octavia, 03-14-02). When Octavia discussed the disadvantage of sports taking away from time she could spend with friends she acknowledged that playing sports was also a time to meet new friends.

You could meet a lot of different people. Different, not like your friends, and...my mom says, she always wants [me] to be different, I mean open to different things, different people, different music, different foods, and different everything. And that’s why I try to be different. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

Octavia enjoys people and, though committed to established friendships, is always open to creating new ones. She likes to use physical activity to reinforce current relationships, and as an arena to meet new people.

Another important way in which the data supports the theme of physical activity as a social role in Octavia’s life, relates not to her own personal participation in sport, but to her passion for watching sporting events and the excitement she derives from being part of a crowd. When first discussing the social aspect of being a spectator with Octavia, she commented on how she was more “into” the games than...
most of her friends, stating, “I be loud....like I pay attention...like most of my friends
they don’t get me because I be like all into the game” (Octavia, 01-30-02). I asked
Octavia if she watches the boys games, the girls games, or both. She responded that,
“since [her] best friend plays for the girls’ team...sometimes [she has] to go, but they
understand if [she doesn’t] go...” (Octavia, 01-30-02). Octavia views attending girls’
games as a favor to friends and to show support.

Octavia lacked excitement for watching games that do not draw large crowds
of people. Going to high school sporting events with large numbers of fans is her
favorite weekly activity (Octavia, 01-30-02). Rose High School keeps all of the
students outside of the building for 30 minutes while they prepare the gymnasium for
the boys’ basketball game. Octavia is excited by the prospect of waiting to get into
the game with other fans: “And then sometimes they put you out at 4:30, but it’s
only...30 minutes and it’s fun out there because there will be a lot of people out
there” (Octavia, 01-30-02). She takes pleasure in the social camaraderie that results
from being part of a crowd at sporting events.

Fulfillment of Gender Roles

The third role that physical activity plays in Octavia’s life is a method through
which she can fulfill gender roles. Octavia learned about the existence of gender roles
early in her athletic endeavors. She became a cheerleader at the age of nine because,
being female, she was not permitted to play in the Greyhound football League. Even
though Octavia qualified for the team during tryouts, both her mother and the
administration of the football league decided that her participation in the organization
would be limited to cheerleading (Octavia, 01-30-02). Since the age of nine Octavia has participated largely in gender specific sports: softball, cheerleading, and dance.

Even though Octavia wanted to play football as a young girl, and despite the fact that one of her closest friends is a talented female athlete (Octavia, 01-30-02), she believes it is appropriate for boys to be more physically active than girls. For example, when I asked Octavia whether more boys or more girls participate in physical education class she responded, “in our class, well we got some girls that don’t, we got some boys that are lazy,…they’re not really into sports” (Octavia, 03-14-02). Octavia applied the term “lazy” exclusively to the boys. She thinks girls who do not participate in physical activity are just being feminine rather than lazy. Octavia accepts inactivity in females as more normal behavior:

...There was an issue like that at our school and they were saying that girls are so lazy, but not all girls, probably more girls are just cause they’re girls, but that doesn’t. That’s not always correct. (Octavia, 03-14-02)

In summary, these factors emerged as the function that physical activity plays in the life of Octavia: satisfying a school requirement, playing social role, and fulfilling gender roles. Each of these factors was repeated time after time in discussions and observations with Octavia, her mother and her physical educator. These three themes illustrate that the enjoyment Octavia derives from physical activity does not stem from her passion for vigorous activity in and of itself, but from a desire to satisfy academic requirements, maintain friendships, and fit society’s norms.

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Case Two: Sam

Sam is fifteen years old and describes herself as active, fun, a little controlling, smart, and a leader (First Writing Activity). Sam describes herself physically as being 5 feet two and three quarter inches tall, having brown eyes and hair, a medium build (130 lbs) and a light skin tone. She lives with her mother, father, and three-year old brother. Sam’s mother works for the Cancer Data Research Services at a Memorial Cancer Hospital and her father is a supervisor of environmental services at the same hospital. Sam categorizes her family’s socio-economic status as middle class. She has an older sister who no longer resides at home. In addition, Sam is close with her god-sister, godmother, and grandmother. Sam views her family as being “pretty close” saying “I mean everybody has their little battles and stuff but we’re pretty close . . . ” (Sam, 01-30-02).

According to Sam, all members of her immediate family are involved in helping out with the “24-hour job” (Sam, 03-06-02) of taking care of her three year old brother:

I mean everybody takes part in the things you have to do for him. One second he wants somebody to play, everyone’s tired, so you know somebody has to do it. And we have to make sure I mean . . . if my mom has to go to a meeting or something or she has to do something else we have to like me and my dad take care of him, like feed him, let him watch movies and play with him, stuff like that. (Sam, 03-06-02)

Sam not only has responsibilities for her younger brother, but it is also important that, at home, she helps out by fulfilling her weekly chores. Although there is no set schedule for Sam to follow with regard to her chores, she notes:
...I have chores, a lot of chores. I have to just do anything like if I see there are some dishes that need to be washed, I wash those or mop the floors at least once a week or something like that. (Sam, 03-05-02)

In addition to focusing on her family, Sam is an active member of Friend Church. On a weekly basis she attends Sunday morning services, goes to bible study, participates in the dance program, and tutors younger students at Friend Church on Tuesdays (Sam, 01-30-02). Sam’s involvement in church requires a minimum of six hours each week.

Sam spends every Wednesday at Memorial Cancer Center as part of a school internship. Sam works a job each weekend at a retirement community (Sam, 01-30-02). Her weekend job is waiting tables in the dining area and she describes it as:

"...it’s a lot of walking, we never get to sit down, they don’t have any chairs around there (laughter by both), so it’s like out on the floor behind the counter for a second. Yes, nothing but walking and rushing and taking orders and delivering them. (Sam, 02-13-02)

These two activities combined constitute twenty hours of Sam’s time every week.

The school Sam attends, Tulip High School, has an enrollment of approximately 602 students. It is a college preparatory high school with an emphasis on the Arts. There are no sports teams at the school. Students who wish to participate in school sports may do so at their “home” school in one or more sports offered in the school district. Thirty-eight percent of the students were on free and reduced lunch at the time of the study. The school is comprised of 54% Black students, 41% non-minority students, 4% Asian students, 1% Spanish students, and has 1 American Indian student.
Sam is in a choral program at her school, and played a, “...Doo Wop girl in
the Little Shop of Horrors this year” (Sam, 02-13-02). Sam estimates that in season
(for tennis or softball) she spends approximately ten hours a day at school and another
three hours in the evening on homework (Sam, 03-06-02). Last semester Sam’s
favorite class was Spanish and during the semester of the data collection, her favorite
class was “gym” (Sam, 03-06-02). Sam sees a relationship between what she does in
the classroom and what she will do in the “real world” particularly with Spanish,
physical education, history, and math:

Kind of, like I know certain classes like Spanish, you can travel, communicate
with other people, PE, PE’s cause you have to work together as a team
teaching different games from around the world and like history class is
teaching you about the past and math is like everything, I really don’t know
how, but they say math is connected to everything, I mean I guess you realize
it after you actually do something that has something to do with math. (Sam,
03-06-02)

Sam receives A’s and B’s in school, and takes her education very seriously. Sam
hopes that in five years she will be in college, most likely in law school, and that in
ten years she will be out of college and starting her own law firm or in a partnership
(Second Writing Activity).

Involvement in Physical Activity

Sam defines physical activity as “keeping in shape and having fun learning
new sports” (First Writing Activity). She has been involved in organized physical
activity since the age of three when she was enrolled in ballet. Sam followed this
with, tap, jazz, African Dance, cheerleading, track, tennis and softball. Sam leads a
very active lifestyle and enjoys being on the go. She was a member of her home
school’s tennis team in the fall, and at the time of the study was a member of the
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softball team. She participates in a dance program at Friend Church, and sometimes
walks and does Tae Bo on the weekends (First Writing Activity). Sam also has
physical education class every day for the semester. Students must complete two
semesters of physical education to graduate. Currently, she is enrolled in her second
and last physical education course, which she refers to as her favorite class (Sam, 03-
05-02). Sam estimates that she is involved in some form of physical activity for 27
hours per week.

Perceptions of Physical Activity

Sam’s perceptions of physical activity are positive: it is an important part of a
healthy lifestyle and it is rewarding (beneficial to the body, teaches life lessons,
fulfills her need to be active, and fulfills her need to be competitive). Although Sam
realizes that there are costs and sacrifices one makes in order to participate in physical
activity, these did not prove to be significant for her.

Important Part of a Healthy Lifestyle

Sam believes physical activity is not only an important part of her life, but is
important to people in general because it helps maintain a healthy lifestyle:

I think it’s very important in order to stay healthy and keep active you know
cause once you start like gaining weight then things like slow down and you
have more problems with your health and everything...It’s kind of [easy to
stay active], I mean you have to [make] like time in your day, cause I’m very
busy all the time, people are like I can’t get a hold of you, but I mean you
have to fit it in somehow. Just even like taking a walk. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Sam sees it is important to set aside time for physical activity every day of the week,
despite how busy life can get.
Although Sam is not very familiar with either the concept of Commit to Be Fit, or the National Guidelines for Physical Activity (Sam, 03-06-02), she still possesses very clear ideas about what it means to be fit and what types of actions are necessary to achieve fitness. When I asked her what she would do if she were going to Commit to Be Fit, she replied:

I have to, well first thing I have to stop eating so much junk food...I drink a lot of juices out of the machines. I try to stay away from pop, but still [I drink] a lot of juice and not enough water is still not good... I’d have to buy like maybe different like supplements or something...(Sam, 03-06-02)

These comments indicate Sam’s understanding that physical activity alone cannot help someone achieve an overall healthy lifestyle. Eating right is just as important a component of good health as exercise. Sam mentions that another important part of being healthy is going to the doctor for regular check-ups (Sam, 03-06-02).

Sam takes her knowledge of what she needs to do to be fit and strives to apply that knowledge into actual lifestyle practices. For example, Sam describes her eating habits at work:

...When I’m at work, we’re allowed to eat anything, and they have...steak and shrimp and oreo cream pie and different things. And I’m like “okay, can’t eat that, can’t eat that. I’ll go eat a salad. Yes, yes eat a salad, get on the salad bar, get some fruit. Drink some water.” That’s another thing, I’ve been drinking a lot of water at work lately cause we have a ton of juices too and I’ll just get ice cold water...And...if I get some prime rib or something I’ll make sure he’ll cut it up a small portion of it just so I can get a taste of it...(Sam, 03-06-02)

She wants to be healthy and doesn’t allow herself to indulge too often in foods she has determined are not beneficial to her.

Sam’s determination, however, extends into other areas of healthy living. For example, Sam perceives physical activity to be of such value that when she can’t find
someone with whom to be physically active, she will exercise on her own: “I mean, if I have to go run a mile, I’ll run a mile by myself if I can’t find anyone to go with me” (Sam, 03-06-02). Sam’s commitment to good health is further illustrated by the fact that she sees herself continuing to be active in the future. Sam commented in her second writing activity that in five years she still plans to be playing tennis and to belong to a gym so that she can participate in physical activities like dance and kickboxing.

Sam has clear ideas about how to remain active, even if one doesn’t have the time or money necessary to make health clubs a feasible option:

Develop [your] own type of schedule. She could put herself on a diet and diet or you know this day I won’t eat this and I’ll run for a half an hour. Or then you could gradually change the pace or how far you’re gonna run. Or there’s like just little exercise channels you could watch those and or go to the library and rent some videos. (Sam, 02-13-02)

This quote reveals that Sam spends time thinking about the importance of physical activity. She doesn’t approach fitness and health haphazardly or half-heartedly. She is very purposeful in her attitude towards exercise, nutrition, and the benefits of regular visits to the doctor. Sam understands the concept of commitment and the importance of physical activity, as well as other components of a healthy lifestyle.

**Rewarding**

Sam finds physical activity rewarding in several ways: she views physical activity as being beneficial to the body, teaching life lessons, fulfilling her need to be active, and fulfilling her need to be competitive.
Beneficial to the body

Sam believes that engaging in physical activity is beneficial to the body and, even though it makes her tired, she loves a good hard physical workout. In reference to whether dance was challenging, Sam stated "Not really, just tiring a little...if you're not used to it, you really get tired out...but it is good exercise" (Sam, 01-30-02).

Teaches Life Lessons

Sam finds that organized physical activity can teach about life. Sam indicated that learning how to handle winning and losing in sports teaches people to handle success and failure in other realms of human activity and competition. She believes different types of physical activity teach different lessons and are rewarding in a variety of ways. Sam discussed the merits of individual sports and team sports:

It really doesn't matter to me, but one thing I do like about like single people sports is that if you mess up, it's your fault. So instead of like 'well you should have been over here when I was trying to pass the ball to you and you should have caught that when I missed it'. Instead of blaming it on the other person. But then the thing about it is...when you're on a team, you're working together and it's fun to have a group of people around you so, I think that's about it. That's why I don't have a problem playing singles or doubles. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Fulfills Need to Be Active

Organized sports offer Sam many opportunities to not only remain active but to apply her energy toward achieving and maintaining fitness, goals she values highly. Sam is very self aware of her desire to be active. She describes herself as being, "...one of those types of people that has to stay active...I have a lot of energy" (Sam, 02-13-02). Sam's view of herself as energetic is a perception shared by other
people. Sam stated that her physical education instructors frequently refer to her high energy level: "...They both tell me all the time, are you gonna play sports cause you need to do something with all of that energy" (Sam, 03-05-02). Sam added, "people tell me that all the time. I like to be active and do different things" (Sam, 02-13-02).

**Fulfills Need to Be Competitive**

The contradictory information that emerged from the data regarding Sam’s competitiveness gives rise to some complexity. Sam, and even her physical education instructor, perceived a definite competitive streak within her approach to physical activity. Sam stated “I’m very competitive, so I like to win; I like strategy” (Sam, 01-30-02). Sam’s description of herself is supported by Ms. Tandy’s comment that:

> Overall I would say she’s probably on the very top as far as competitiveness. Out of a scale of 10, she’s right up at the 8,9,10 range because ah, everything she does, she wants to be the best. She wants to be the best jump roper. She wants to be the best at Tae Bo. She brings the tape in. She wants to be in charge and wants to do very well and be the best at it and she gets very upset if she doesn’t. So competitive wise she’s one of the most competitive females. (Ms. Tandy, 03-04-02)

The language of both previous quotes is clear; Sam is competitive. Yet, data pertaining to this theme also suggested that Sam does not use physical activity as an arena in which to compete, but rather as a way through which she can build confidence. For instance, Sam tends to participate in only those sports in which she feels she can win, or at least those in which she feels her skill level is above average. When I asked Sam if the reason she dropped track was because she didn’t like it, she said “I liked it, but I was just scared that I wasn’t gonna win” (Sam, 02-13-02). Here, Sam indicates that even though she enjoyed track, a conflict existed between her desire to “be the best” (Sam, 03-06-02) and her enjoyment of the sport.
Sam said she chose not to play organized sports her first year in high school because she feared the skill level of the older students:

My freshman year I didn’t do anything ‘cause I was scared. I was scared, you know, going to high school, scared about the older kids…(Sam, 02-13-02).

Sam wants to feel comfortable with her skill level in a sport before she dedicates a lot of time to it. She wants to feel good about herself. When Sam was asked how she decided which physical activities she would like to try, she responded, “First, I see things I like. [and then] I make sure I have the ability to do them” (Sam, 02-13-02).

Sam’s fear of losing can be further illustrated by her reaction to losing a badminton game in physical education class:

I kept trying to um what is it called, slap the birdie over the net, and I would miss…I just got really upset and I just, after we played that game, I went and laid down on the bench. I was just so mad (Sam, 03-06-02).

Sam became very angry and frustrated during this badminton game because she didn’t play as well as usual. According to her, her team had only ever lost one game.

In summary, Sam has a very positive attitude towards physical activity. The data collected from her does not indicate that she associates anything negative with physical activity. She views physical activity as rewarding in its benefits to the body, in the lessons it teaches about life, and in that it allows her to express her competitive nature and her need for activity. Sam also firmly believes that physical activity is necessary to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. These themes arose from Sam’s interviews and were supported by comments from her teacher and mother.
Sources Influencing Beliefs About Physical Activity

Sam draws upon several sources when describing her beliefs about physical activity including: her family, her teachers and coaches, the church, the media, and her friends.

Family

Sam has several female role models within her family. To better understand the information contained in this section, it is important to note that Sam has an older sister who no longer resides with her family. Thus, when she refers to her immediate family, she often is alluding only to her mother, father and younger brother.

Although Sam did not feel capable of articulating how her parents feel about her involvement in physical activity, Sam believes her parents are supportive of her physical endeavors. She is certain that “they like it that I’m active and everything” (Sam, 02-13-02). Sam believes her parents are willing to help make participation in physical activity possible by assisting her with costs and transportation. Sam is required to pay for some of the activities in which she engages because, as she puts it, “…I have a job I have to pay some portion of it” (Sam, 02-13-02).

Sam’s mother not only values how critical it is for her to be active, but she also imparts this value to Sam by supporting her in her physical activity pursuits and by making sure Sam is aware of her family’s health history:

Well I think it’s great for her, you know, especially you know since she’s athletic and . . . the exercise and all that is very important. So I think it’s very important. Um that she participates in anything that’s dealing with her health. And then she also knows our family’s history also and um and she’s very conscientious about now her weight and things, so I guess…(Ms. Hooks, 03-20-02)
Sam's mother describes her daughter as being: aggressive, intelligent, witty, somewhat organized and knowledgeable (Ms. Hooks, 03-20-02). Sam's mother views physical activity and nutrition as important:

Right now. Well I am exercising. Medically I have to, walking, more walking, um, let's see...any type of exercise...I just purchased the ab force thing, laughter by both. (Ms. Hooks, 03-20-02)

Realizing that she is genetically predisposed to certain health problems, Ms. Hooks makes a point to make exercise an important part of her life: “... obesity runs in my family and I'm trying to maintain so that I don’t get that way” (Ms. Hooks, 03-20-02).

Sam and her mother have a close relationship. Sam stated, “…the majority of the things that I do, I do with my mom” (Sam, 02-13-02). Sam’s mother used to advise the dance program at Friend Church. Although Sam noted that it was a “different” type of experience to have her mother be the formal instructor of a physical activity in which she was involved, she also was aware that everyone, including Sam, enjoyed this experience: “...I just liked when she used to teach. I don't know, it was just something about it that everyone liked when she was the advisor” (Sam, 02-13-02).

Sam knew her mother participated on the drill team and marching band in high school, and was, at one time, the advisor of a drill team (Sam, 02-13-02). She was also the advisor of a drill team at a recreation center when Sam was five or six years old. Watching her mother advise the drill team and coach female adolescents was significant to Sam and her view of physical activity as evidenced by her recollection of why her mother became involved in the experience:
Well we talk about that [nutrition] all the time. I'm like mom. We need to buy some grapes instead of buying a bag of chips or whatever. And then try to help my brother have good eating habits, but he doesn't eat that much as it is anyways. So like you know just different things. Like she'll buy yogurt and we eat salad and grapes, we're starting to eat, like instead of buying so many junk foods, donuts and chips and things...(Sam, 03-05-02)

Sam's knowledge of what constitutes good nutrition has been gained mostly through conversations with her mother:

Well since she liked drill team when she was in high school and everything when she was participating that's how she like got that started and she really how much she liked it and everything and more people started coming and they started doing parades and different things. I guess finding a way for other girls to get active and things instead of like being lazy all the time or something, that's one thing I think she probably did like (Sam, 02-13-02)...Yeah, it was, well I think well she started that drill team at um a local um Recreational center and it was to help discipline young girls and get them active cause most of them you know they don't do anything they just sit at home or get into trouble so she did that to help them have a different mindset on things to do...(Sam, 03-05-02)

Sam's mother participates in and leads organized physical activity and shares these experiences with her daughter. Yet Sam thinks her mother is critical of her when she doesn't perform well in her physical activities:

...The one thing when I lose she’s like well that's your fault. You should have done this and you should have done that, and she starts nagging...But, otherwise, she doesn't try to put me down too bad but she notices things that I need to improve on. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Sam's father also influences her beliefs about physical activity. She indicates that although her father does not compete "as hard" (Sam, 02-13-02) as he used to, he still participates in softball and basketball leagues through the hospital where he works. Sam and her father are physically active together in several ways. In the summertime, she, her father and brother take walks together (Sam, 02-13-02).
Sam became interested in softball: “...because my father used to play it. When he used to play softball, I used to like going to the games and watching him play…” (Sam, 02-13-02). Sam’s father has also imparted some of his views on appropriate gender roles for boys and girls in sports. Sam noted:

I don’t think that my dad would let him [Sam’s brother] do ballet. But like he supports me in anything that I do, like okay well we can go practice this or something. And when I first told him that I was going to play softball...then my dad like helped me with you know throwing and catching and different things like that. (Sam, 03-05-02)

In addition to her immediate family members, Sam’s godmother and grandmother encourage her to be physically active. They tell Sam that “[she needs] to stay active and get into things” (Sam, 03-05-02). Sam’s grandmother is overweight and wants Sam to keep active so that she does not follow the same unhealthy path. Sam stated that her godmother has recently (the past year)

started um going to the gym and she got a personal trainer and different things and she’s on these different diets,...she doesn’t eat a lot of carbohydrates or something like that. I don’t know what it is really. Different things, she started cause she wants to show her daughter, cause her daughter is...4. And she’s...showing her cause she noticed that Jessica, that’s her name, she’s starting to pick up these bad habits of always wanting candy and different things so she’s...stopping it now and showing her the right things to be eating and different things like that instead of having a dish of candy, eat some carrots or something like that. So she does, she’s started that last year. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Sam is very close to her two god-sisters, one of whom she describes as being “that big (indicates tiny)” (Sam, 03-06-02). Sam is amazed with the fact that her god-sister “eats a ton of food and it doesn’t go anywhere. I’m like ‘how do you do it?’” She then answers her own question by acknowledging that her god-sister “must have a high metabolism rate” (Sam, 03-06-02).
Of all the people in Sam’s family, she is the most physically active with her other god-sister, Sade. They participate together in the Dance Program at Friend Church and have fun doing fitness activities together:

we’re like today we’re gonna do nothing but workout and like show a couple of our little exercises, we’ll do Tae Bo, we’ll go jogging for 10 minutes and come back out of breath. Jump rope, or like okay we’re gonna eat some celery and carrots all day...And just eat little stuff and our parents are looking at us like we’re crazy but, we have fun trying to be fit. Yeah, and then Octavia, well like she’s like into like drill team kind of stuff, so she’s always, we’re always dancing. (Sam, 02-13-02)

For someone like Sam, who takes competing in organized sport very seriously, it is enjoyable to be active with someone who just has “fun trying to be fit”. Sam speaks very highly of her god-sister and states that of all the people in her life, she is whom Sam would Commit to Be Fit with: “…she would be the only one who would probably go through it with me, we would do it together” (Sam, 03-05-02).

Teachers and Coaches

Although much of what Sam has learned regarding healthy lifestyles has come from her family, she has also learned about it at school from her teachers and coaches. Besides encouraging Sam to be physically active, her instructors and coaches have also taught her good habits relating to physical activity. Sam said that she has learned about the importance of stretching both in physical education class and at dance from her instructors (Sam, 03-05-02). Sam also learned about the necessity of stretching through her experience with softball; “But this is like a prime example. My softball coach told me to stretch and I didn’t and we were running sprints and my body hurts” (Sam, 03-06-02).
Church

Sam has described dance at Friend Church as being structured (Sam, 02-13-02) and indicates that one of the church leaders Reverend Thunder (a woman) has made an effort to discuss the importance of a healthy lifestyle with the adolescents there:

...Reverend [Thunder] has talked about it before, like you need to take care of your body. Yeah, she talks about it all the time, never mind. She does talk about it all the time, cause she says ‘you want to look like me...look like me’...‘you have to eat right, you can’t sit there and eat all those chips and donuts and’...‘you need to run’ and da da da da da. (Sam, 03-06-02)

Sam also spoke of how the church is beginning to utilize the concept of getting the family involved in different activities. Although these are not exclusively physical activities, Sam believes that this is something that would benefit those at the church (Sam, 3-6-02). Additionally, in a focus group interview, Sam, Octavia, and Sara (2-19-02) stated that the church does not offer enough physical activities and that the attitudes of those attending the church suggest they do not necessarily see the benefits of physical activity. They suggested that the church utilize family time to incorporate and offer physical activities for the church that would allow an entire family to be active at the same time. It was also suggested that finding ways to get adults to participate more would increase physical activities for youth (2-19-02).

Media

Sam’s valuing of a healthy lifestyle gives her the initiative to learn about living a healthy lifestyle: “Like I may investigate or ‘oh I seen this on TV and I think I’d like to try to do that’ or something like that” (Sam, 02-13-02). Sam is not an
indiscriminant viewer of the media. She discussed the possibilities of false advertising and her efforts to decipher the messages she receives:

'Yeah, these pills, I took them in one week and I lost 200 pounds'. Yeah, right. I'm just like whatever. The ones that you're just like that's impossible, yeah, right, false advertisements...And then there's the ones that, I can understand...when people...certain people who do slim fast. And they're... 'yeah in three months I lost twenty pounds'. That's a nice, you know, that makes sense, but you have to exercise also, they don't just make it seem like if you drink slim fast you'll lose weight, but it also says on the bottom you have to exercise and be on a diet, some type of diet. (Sam, 03-05-02)

The media has influenced Sam's involvement in tennis:

I know one reason that I wanted to get in tennis was the Venus and Serina Sisters, I saw that and I was like "oh yeah, I wanna" you know, get into tennis. Like some people like to play basketball because of like (not sure who) or Michael Jordan or something like that, and I got interested in softball because my father used to play it. (Sam, 02-13-02)

The media has similarly influenced her desire to join a gym when she turns 18. After seeing commercials for different gyms on television, Sam thought, 'oh, man I want to join a gym and workout and meet new people and have fun'. So, I just know that's what I want to do" (Sam, 03-05-02).

In addition to watching different sports on television and gaining interest in them, Sam discussed how the media has impacted her view of who is portrayed as being physically active: "...I don't see that many like females, African American females in commercial type things..." (Sam, 3-5-02). Sam noted that the media affects society's view that sports are race specific:

...If you think about statistics the majority of the people they don't really like, if you think about like the majority of the people who like to watch baseball, softball are Caucasian. And the Blacks, aren't really when they watch TV they see basketball, football, they don't see baseball games you know, and they're not interested in seeing baseball games or golf or you know and that's the majority of the Caucasian crowd that participate in those things and a lot of
the boys, they get into, their parents put them into those sports when they’re younger, like t-ball, and as they get older, they evolve to baseball. (Sam, 03-05-02)

Friends

Sam’s friends also serve as a source of information about physical activity for her. Sam believes that her friends would use the following five words to describe her: risky, intelligent, judgmental, funny, and supportive. Sam states that she is surrounded by physically active people both at school and at church (Sam, 02-13-02). Some of her close friends at school are males who play football, basketball, soccer and baseball. Sam noted that her friends often speak of having to lift weights:

Cause they all, most of them they like participate in sports and like are always doing something to that effect like he plays football and she’s on the drill team, he plays basketball and he plays basketball and he plays soccer, she’s a cheerleader and he plays baseball and football. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Though Sam does not participate in physical activity with any of her friends at work, she mentioned that they “all participate in sports and everything…” (Sam, 02-13-02). They attend a different school system and reside further from Sam’s neighborhood and it is hard for her to visit them at home.

In general, Sam views her friends as supportive of her involvement in physical activity and complimentary of her skill level, “My friends, some of my friends, they’ll tell me like you need to do this cause you’re good at this” (Sam, 03-05-02).

Sam primarily draws upon family, teacher/coaches, church, media, and friends for her beliefs about physical activity. Each theme presented by Sam was repeated over and over again in my discussions with her, in her writing activities, and in the interviews with her mother and Ms. Tandy.
The Function of Physical Activity

Physical activity functions in four primary ways within Sam’s life: evokes self-discipline, fulfills a school physical education requirement, functions as a venue through which Sam can encourage others, and functions as a social outlet in her life.

Structured Aspect of Physical Activity Evokes Self-Discipline

Sam believes organized physical activity adds discipline to her life. This perception is so strong that she applies it even to past experiences in sport and physical activity. For instance, when she reflected on her ballet experiences as a very young child she recalled:

…I mean you have to have discipline for like ballet dancing and when you’re three, discipline is not a thing. I wish she would have kept me in ballet though because then I know there’s a lot of kids their parents keep them in it even though they hate it and then once they get older they’ll appreciate it…(Sam, 02-13-02)

Sam’s understanding of the importance of discipline in sports and physical activities caused her to quit cheerleading because she could not make a sufficient time commitment:

I loved to cheer and then I stopped doing that because I kept missing so many practices ‘cause it was during the summertime. Like we would go to Disneyworld or something and stay there for a week and it was just like missing all those practices and they’re just like “what’s your point”. You know. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Not only does Sam value the importance of commitment and discipline within the confines of structured practice, she also realizes that a true commitment to an organized physical activity requires discipline outside of the practice schedule:

Well I mean it’s one of those self-effort type things. Like after school, I mean after softball, I’m supposed to go home and practice softball. You know after
tennis, I'm supposed to go hit on the side of a building. You know I have to do that type of stuff on my own. (Sam, 03-05-02)

Sam recognizes that much of the discipline involved in being successful in sports is internal and believes she has to practice on her own.

Venue to Fulfill Physical Education Requirement

Physical activity serves to fulfill the physical education requirement at Sam's school. Sam thoroughly enjoys physical education and participates as fully as she can. Ms. Tandy, Sam's instructor, describes Sam as being "very receptive, she loves to participate" (Ms. Tandy, 03-04-02). Sam is not only receptive to physical education, but thinks everyone should give a good effort in class. Sam approves of the penalties for students who choose not to participate in class noting:

...if you don't dress you lose four points and if you don't participate you lose four points...that's how they do it, but if you don't dress, they give you a packet to do over a sport and you have to turn it in by the end of class...that's the advantage, instead of just sitting there your're like 'oh, I have to do this packet' so you wanna dress. (Sam, 01-30-02)

According to her instructor Sam takes what she learns in class and uses it outside of class to improve her fitness level. Ms. Tandy, who introduced Tae Bo to her class as part of their warm-ups, noted that:

she's right at the top, she understands fitness, ah, she's very involved in it and she's very fit. She works out with Tae Bo and realizes that she needs to keep her, her body toned and does work at it and so that is a priority to her outside of physical education. Which is nice. (Ms. Tandy, 03-04-02)

Ms. Tandy indicated that Sam's skill level "runs about average on the team sports. She's kind of right in the middle. But if it's anything fitness related, she's gonna be at the top end" (Ms. Tandy, 03-04-02).
Venue for Encouraging Others

Sam’s perception of physical activity as important to a healthy lifestyle inspires her to encourage others to be physically active. For Sam, physical activity is a means through which she can encourage others in a socially acceptable manner. She believes her peers should participate in physical education. She has gone so far as to bring in clothes for a classmate to wear so that she could participate:

Well, like yesterday [and] Candy. Her excuse for not um participating in gym was because she didn’t have any clothes, any dress like clothes to wear. So I brought her some clothes and she dressed, but she didn’t participate, so it’s like you still lost some points, so...(Sam, 01-30-02)

Perhaps Sam’s awareness of the needs of others and their interests in physical activity is attributable to her apparent enjoyment of leadership roles in her physical education class. Sam’s desire to be a leader in this area is evident in her statement that:

I just know one of my qualities. I have leadership qualities, and it’s been like that since I was like who knows how old, since I was like 6 or 5 or something like that, I’ve always had leadership qualities. It comes natural. (Sam, 03-05-02)

This is further evidenced by her satisfaction in utilizing leadership skills as a team captain:

Right…and so I’m like “don’t kick so hard, keep your feet low, back him up”…you know because I like that and then my teachers were talking about how good of a coach I am. (Sam, 01-30-02)

When I asked her what she liked about coaching the different people on her team she responded: “Teamwork and everything…It made me feel like I was in control, so…But I liked that, it was fun” (Sam, 01-30-02).
Social Experience

Physical activity also functions as a means to be social, particularly with regard to enjoying the camaraderie that often results from physical activity engagement. With regard to doing Tae Bo in physical education class Sam stated, “...I have fun you know because it’s more than me doing it, it's a whole class and everything” (Sam, 01-30-02). Sam enjoys Tae Bo at school more than at home:

...cause I don't like doing it by myself. I'll do it, but it's a lot more fun when you have somebody else there laughing with you like “oh you’re messing up the kick”...ha ha ha ha ha. And like when you’re with a group, you have a lot more fun then when you’re by yourself, unless you’re just that type of person. (Sam, 03-05-02)

Most of the enjoyment Sam derives from “group” physical activities revolves around the camaraderie that comes from sharing the physical experience with others.

Perhaps one of the reasons Sam enjoys physical education so much is because she is accepted by most of the males in the class. From my observation of Sam in physical education class She was active in the basketball games they were playing. I often observed Sam coming off to the sidelines and receiving high fives from her male teammates (Observation Notes, 03-04-02). I was, however, interested in learning more about one particular situation I observed and asked Sam about it:

I remember from watching the other day... there was one time that you were often, wide open, and they didn’t’ pass you the ball, and it happened again, it was one time when you were out playing, and you, it looked like you got frustrated. (Sam, 03-06-02)

Sam responded:

Cause I mean, it’s like I, we had this little I don’t know what you call it, type of seminar thing about different things. One was [on] sexism, adultism, and racism. And I was just sitting there thinking about it like I’m, I know I’m the
only girl out here, you are two guys, but I'm open, there's no one blocking me, I'm not that good at offense, but you're stuck, so why don't you pass me the ball. And that type of stuff makes me mad, especially when I'm yelling I'm open. I could see if I'm just standing there and I wasn't trying to participate. Like some of the girls, they just stand there and they don't care, but I was trying to participate. Pass me the ball, so that was like kind of making me mad, but then they like apologized after we got through we got done and everything. They're like “I'm sorry, I didn't know, or I'm sorry, I'm sorry”, different things like that. I thought I was the only one that noticed that, thank you. (Sam, 03-06-02)

Sam explained the seminar was something that the school offered to students about particular topics that are related to the world. There was no connection made in this seminar about how the different “ism's” related to the sporting world. Yet, this fifteen-year old young woman saw how it related to her physical education class.

Sam explained further; “I could see if I’m just standing there and I wasn’t trying to participate, like some of the girls, they just stand there and they don’t care, but I was trying to participate”. Sam began by stating that in reference to some of the other girls in her class that the boys “get mad at them” and often say “man you suck, go sit down” (Sam, 03-05-02). At first she defended the boy’s response saying:

Well, it’s not like the girls in our class don’t have the ability, they just choose not to. The ones that choose not to, that's who they get on. Like “why are you just standing there, I passed you the ball, why are you traveling”. Like the girls that don’t participate, they do it intentionally...(Sam, 03-05-02)

But then she countered with the view that some girls “they don’t try to play because they don’t want to get made fun of (Sam, 3-5-02). Ms. Tandy supported this by expressing her belief that an all girls setting for physical activity would encourage more girls to participate. She commented:

Girls tend to not want to participate with the boys there. And I don’t know if it's they're worried about how they look, what the boys are going to think about them, which is a lot of it. You know how they feel about themselves and
what the boys are gong to say about them. So I think when the girls compete against the girls, it's a whole a whole different atmosphere. Just ah, my husband's at ABC and the girls are different there because they're not there to impress anybody. They don't have to worry what the other gender is thinking which is a huge, huge social issue in school. (Ms. Tandy, 03-04-02)

Despite Sam's realization that many girls perceive participation in physical activity as socially inhibiting, she views physical activity as socially enhancing:

...Because I mean when you play the game you have to cooperate and participate and then like certain things like may happen like something funny and then you know you talk about it and just it brings you closer to people makes you more social and everything”. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Sam is able to replicate this attitude about cooperative activities bringing people closer together in other aspects of her life. For instance, she joined choral at her school despite the fact that it is during her lunch period with her friends in her grade level, and viewed this as an opportunity to meet new people:

Somewhat. I mean that's the only thing, I miss eating with my friends and being around them, but I mean if I really want to see them, I can you know call them or you know do something with them. But then the other things that now, I mean, I'm closer to some seniors and juniors that I never like would have thought I would talk to, and so that's probably it. (Sam, 02-13-02)

Physical activity functions in four main ways in Sam's life: it creates self-discipline in her life, causing her to commit time to her activities outside of their organized practices, it functions as a fulfillment of her physical education requirements for school, it functions as a venue through which she can encourage others to be physically active, and it enhances her social life by creating different opportunities for her to interact with others.
Case Three: Tynesha

Tynesha is eighteen years old and describes herself as: nice, funny, smart, short, and sleepy. Tynesha describes herself physically as being 5 feet four inches tall, weighing 120 pounds with a medium build. She lives with her mother and two younger siblings, a brother (16 years old), and a sister (14 years old). Tynesha also has a brother (17) who does not live at home. Tynesha describes her family as middle class. Tynesha’s mother works two jobs (her daytime job is at a church day care center, and she also works several evenings a week at a local fast food restaurant) to support her children, all three of whom attend the same high school and participate in Upward Bound, a program to help minority children attend college. Tynesha’s mother plans on taking classes this summer towards her college degree. Despite having to coordinate four schedules, Tynesha and her family are very close. They enjoy doing things as a family and frequently spend Sunday afternoons together, sometimes going to the park, sometimes sharing a meal or playing games. Tynesha and her family are also very active members of Friend Church. She shared with me that she spends an average of 13 hours a week at various church activities including: Bible Study, tutoring, dance and Sunday services.

Tynesha attends Daisy High School, which has an enrollment of 1130 students. Forty-percent of the school was on free and reduced lunches during the 2001—2002 school year. The school’s population consists of 29% Black students, 63% white and non-minority students, 6.5% Asian students, and less than two percent Spanish and American Indian students. Tynesha takes college preparatory courses and estimates that during a busy week she spends an average of four hours each night
working on homework, but typically devotes an hour and a half to homework after school. Tynesha maintains a “B” average in school. Her orchestra instructor described her as a “smart student...very attentive,” and possessed “a good attitude” and “a good work ethic” (Mr. Wolfgang, 03-21-02). Some of Tynesha’s classes at the time of the study included: History, English, Spanish and Orchestra. Her favorite subjects at the time of the study were English and Math. Tynesha’s main interest, however, is computers. When she attends college next year she plans to study computer science and hopes that in 10 years she will be working on her Master’s or her Ph.D in some other state. She believes she will be successful in attaining her goals because she has a plan for achieving them. Another of Tynesha’s interests is music. She has been playing the violin for more than seven years and is part of her high school’s orchestra. Tynesha referred to the instrument as her “baby” (Tynesha, 02-01-02).

Involvement in Physical Activity

Tynesha defines physical activity as “...activity that is physical that helps you stay healthy and in shape” (Journal Activity, 03-04-02). Tynesha does not feel like there are any “triggers” that would cause her to be more involved in physical activity and described physical activity as, “... something if you want to do it or you don’t want to do it” (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Tynesha has been involved in physical activity since she was a young child. Swimming was her first physical activity, which she learned at a very young age and which continues to be her favorite. In the summer she spend hours in the pool at the local recreation center. She often practices with the swim team there even though she
is not a formal member of the team. Swimming was followed by basketball, tennis and dance. She presently describes herself as being physically active 15 hours a week, though this was hard to accurately assess because so much of her physical activity was informal. Currently, Tynesha is not involved in any organized sports or physical activities aside from the dance program at Friend Church. When she attends college, however, she plans to join a health club, become a cheerleader, and pursue whatever sports spark her interest (Tynesha, 03-04-02).

Perceptions of Physical Activity

Tynesha has three main perceptions of physical activity, two positive and one negative respectively: physical activity as something beneficial to one’s health (including the affective domain of health), physical activity as pure enjoyment, and physical activity as a deflator of self-confidence.

Health Benefits/Nutrition

Tynesha perceives physical activity as being beneficial to one’s health. For instance, when she said, “you shouldn’t be [overweight]”, she further clarified this statement, illustrating that she can decipher between being fat and being unhealthy:

...you want to be healthy you don’t want to have health problems. Say you have a bad heart [because] you got [unhealthy cells] around it because you don’t exercise [regularly]. You should eat healthy foods and [some sort of daily exercise] I think it’s good. (Tynesha, 02-11-02)

Tynesha associates the absence of physical activity in one’s life with potential health and heart complications. She recognizes that health benefits are not the sole product of being physically active, but that they also result from healthy eating. Tynesha believes physical activity and good nutrition are associated with a healthy heart and a
healthy body, and that besides just looking good, physical activity can help you feel good as well.

*Physical Activity/Enjoyment*

An additional health benefit Tynesha associates with physical activity is that of a social or affective domain. Physical activity is pure enjoyment and fun for Tynesha. She has long been involved in physical activity because she enjoys the recreational aspect of it. During her childhood, Tynesha’s activities included: swimming, and playing basketball and tennis. Although she mentioned that she “used to love playing basketball and tennis” (Tynesha, 02-11-02), swimming was her favorite childhood physical activity. Her favorite physical activities as a teenager are similar to those of her childhood: swimming, basketball, running (sometimes) and walking. Tynesha hesitated when she listed walking, because she seemed unsure whether walking counted as a physical activity, asking, “walking is a sport, right?” (Tynesha, 02-11-02). The order of her favorite physical activities during her teen years is: swimming, dance, basketball (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Tynesha mentioned that she is unaware of why her enjoyment for certain activities has shifted over the years, but she did note:

I don’t know, I just didn’t like them anymore. It got tiring. I tried basically everything, I was a tennis player, I was a basketball player, I did swim, I haven’t done any golf yet, but I wanna be like Tiger Woods and do that little golf put thingy. But most of those things, as I get older, I want to try new things, like bungie jumping. (Tynesha, 02-11-02)

For instance when I asked Tynesha how she learned to play tennis, she replied, “[they had this activity] at our school and they said if you wanted to play tennis you could
go. And I went" (Tynesha, 02-11-02). In exploring tennis, she discovered that she really enjoyed it:

...I got my little puma tennis racket with the puma tennis balls... Somebody broke it. But it was so cute, I used to have it in my closet all the time and I would pull it out and hit it against the wall...I play outside [at] the little...I played with the older people, they always beat me. Then I would go home, and I would say 'I'll go play with somebody who don't know how to play'. I was pretty good...(Tynesha, 02-11-02)

This experience, in which her curiosity was rewarded when she was relatively young, has caused her to maintain and act on her curiosity since then. This is illustrated by her informal involvement with swimming: “I like to go swimming in the summer or watch the swim team because I was unsure about joining” (Tynesha, 03-04-02).

She observed a swim team and decided to join in on the practices just for fun. A similar curiosity developed with track: “I always wanted to run hurdles. I always wanted to run, but I am scared to go out there...I want to run hurdles, if I go out [for the team]. I would probably do sprints...Hurdles and sprints” (Tynesha, 2-11-02).

Even though the outcome of the particular instant described above has caused her to be a bit frightened of attempting track events, the fact that she plans to act on her curiosity in the future is evident. She plans to tryout for cheerleading in college despite the fact that she has had no previous experience in that field (Tynesha, 3-4-02). Tynesha does not appear to be intimidated by the fact that she will tryout for cheerleading at the college level having no prior experience, but against others who most likely have had years of experience. Rather, she emphasizes that she’s just doing this because she’s always wanted to and thinks it will be fun:

I’ll probably just take one of their cheers and change the words. Ah yes, that sounds pretty good, and do the cheer like I cheered before. ‘You cheer?’

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Mmmmm. Nope. But I want to be a cheerleader, I always wanted to, I just never tried out for it. (Tynesha, 3-4-03)

Tynesha values the element of fun within physical activity so much that she does not let her fear or lack of experience with the activity interfere with her interest in trying new things.

*Decreases Confidence*

Tynesha says physical activity is fun (Tynesha, 03-04-02), but also views it as an area of her life within which her self-confidence is easily debilitated. During a conversation about whether or not she would join the track team at school, Tynesha stated:

> The school wants me to be on the track team so I could throw the ball. I would throw shot put. I don’t really want to do that...I would just sit there and throw the ball, I don’t mind...I might be able to throw it real far, I don’t know...If I do run track, I wanna do hurdles if I do. I’ll probably just start and see how many I knock down, if I knock down too many, I’m not gonna do it,

(Tynesha, 02-01-02).

Tynesha seemed to question if she should go out for the team. Her comments about shot put suggest her belief that it doesn’t take a lot of skill to do this sport. Tynesha had commented that she “always wanted to run hurdles” (Tynehsa, 02-11-02) but her uncertainty about her ability to perform well in the hurdles might keep her from participating in this event. Her enjoyment of and willingness to participate in track and specifically in hurdles seems related to her sense of competence.

In summary, the data that arose pertaining to Tynesha, suggest over and over again that she views physical activity as beneficial to one’s health and enjoyable. Yet she prefers to participate in informal types of physical activity due to a lack of confidence in her own ability to do well.
Sources Influencing Beliefs About Physical Activity

Tynesha draws upon several sources to help describe her beliefs about physical activity. These include her family (her mother, sister, brother and auntie); the church; school; and her friends. Each source is described in this section.

Family

Tynesha has a very close relationship with her family and stated that they support her unconditionally; “with everything I do, they’d say “go on girl, I’ll go help you, want me to help you?” (Tynesha, 02-11-02). Tynesha’s mother ran track in junior high and high school, and is presently involved in the adult dance program at Friend Church. Tynesha also spoke of her mother’s enjoyment of walking: “When my mom gets the time, she likes to walk. She likes to go over to the park and the track. She likes that stuff” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha acknowledges that her mother is the biggest influence in her life (Tynesha, 02-11-02). When given the choice on Saturday’s to hang out with friends or her mother, Tynesha stated that she and her sister and brother “hang out with my mom” (Tynesha, 02-01-02).

Tynesha’s mother enjoys physical activity and encourages casual and spontaneous physical activity for her children. Tynesha provided an example of her mother’s encouragement when she talked about practicing dance at home with her sister:

Sometimes we might dance or sometimes my sister might just sing the song and I’ll do it because I kind of forget the song, I can remember the steps, but then I don’t know what song it goes to. But she usually sings the song and I’ll dance to it. And my mom, she comes and she does her little step too. (Tynesha, 02-11-02)
Tynesha’s mother is supportive not only of non-structured physical activity, but of organized activity as well. When I asked Tynesha if she believes her mother encourages her involvement in the dance program at Friend Church, she responded:

My mom likes when we dance...anything we get into she supports. We don’t have to be good. If I said I wanted to go on track, she wouldn’t mind. She’d say ‘where you running to’.... ‘I’ll cheer for you, go baby...she in last place, but she tries’ (Tynesha, 2-1-02).

Tynesha’s mother is supportive of her children’s involvement in physical activities because of the enjoyment they will gain from such an experience. It is not contingent on her children possessing a high skill level. She just wants her children to have fun with physical activity. For instance, Tynesha feels that if her mother could pick which physical activities her daughter participated in, she would pick swimming, simply “cause I like it” (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Even though Tynesha feels supported by her mother and thinks her mother believes exercise is important, they do not often talk about physical activity. Tynesha does not remember her mother ever talking to her about healthy lifestyles or what physical education class was like for her mother. However, she does recall her mother sharing stories with her about walking all the time when she was in school and telling her, “...I used to walk from here to there’, so I guess she exercises alright...she’s walked a whole lot. She got big old calves” (Tynesha, 02-11-02). Tynesha’s mother has shared a story with her about a daily experience in physical activity that has had an affect on her daughter. Tynesha is able to take this information a step further and conclude that walking is the reason her mother’s calves are muscular. She admires the affect that physical activity has had on her mother and states that her mother has...
“pretty calves. I love her calves. I'm like flex those calves momma” (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Tynesha initiates conversations with her mother about her own experiences in physical education class:

I would usually come home like “mom, guess what I did, I played with the bow and arrows”. And I did this. She’ll say ‘you did’... ‘yeah, I know how to shoot it right in the bullseye’... Like when we come home when we eat dinner, mom says ‘how was your day, how’s school going or when I had physical education’. I be like ‘guess what I did today’... She might say ‘when I was little we played this in gym’. She says something about shooting the arrow or something about her day. (Tynesha, 02-11-02)

Her mother encourages each of her children equally, despite their gender, to be physically active (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha’s mother purchased Tae Bo tapes for the family to use (Tynesha, 02-11-02). She also assists them financially and with transportation to attend physical activity events, despite her extremely busy work schedule (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Tynesha’s sister, though younger (age 14), provides her with a constant source of encouragement both with regard to formal and informal physical activities. Besides participating in dance together, the two siblings frequently engage in informal exercises. For example, Tynesha described being chased around the house by her sister as quite a work out:

That’s what we do, that’s exercise for me because afterwards we would be out of breath. Then we start over again. But she runs track, so she’s pretty fast, then when the dogs around I run faster than her. She says “you cheated”... “no”... When it comes down, I can run. It just depends, if you get out there and just run, but if something’s chasing me, I can run... (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Tynesha likes to have fun working out with her sister using the Tae Bo videotapes:
After they do a double double time...I’ll go get something to drink. Then she gets tired and I get up for about five more minutes. I could do the eight minute work out. Whatever, I tried one time, I was real tired...So me and my sister and my brother we was kicking...Later on she got tired and we all got back up...we were taking a drink break...but we do it every once in a while just to sit there and be goofy...She would be doing it, and I’ll be like “no you gotta do it like this”. We have fun with the little Tae Bo...And my mom she’s sitting there like “yeah, exercise”. (Tynesha, 2/11/02)

Tynesha stated that of all the people in her life, she would most likely engage in physical activity with her sister (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

In addition to the influence of some of Tynesha’s immediate family members, her auntie (her mother’s sister), was an additional source of influence upon her beliefs about physical activity. She helped Tynesha feel positively about being physically active when she was younger. Her aunt introduced her to her favorite physical activity: “My auntie taught me. She’d take me swimming all the time when I was like three and four...we’d go camping every summer. That’s how I learned how to swim, then I taught everybody else how to swim” (Tynesha, 2-11-02). Tynesha is not aware of other physical activities in which her auntie is involved, but knows she likes to swim and is supportive of her endeavors physical or otherwise (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

Church

The church is a very important part of Tynesha’s life. She ranks church as being her first priority in life, followed by family and then school (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha spends approximately 13 hours a week at Friend Church (Tynesha, 03-04-02). I asked her how she became involved in dance originally and she said: “I seen dance one time and we said since we didn’t want to be in the choir. But we

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wanted to be social in the church, so we wanted to do something which was dance”
(Tynesha, 2-11-02). If it were not for Tynesha’s desire to be active in the church, she
would not be involved in dance, an activity that constitutes the majority of her weekly
exercise.

At dance, and subsequently through church, Tynesha has learned about the
importance of structure within life’s activities and about the subtleties of social
interaction during organized physical activities.

We go, we warm up, stretch and then we get into the dance and the teacher
tells us which parts is wrong and what to do to fix it, then we practice it,
practice it, take a break, The teacher helps the people that have parts that they
need help on, and then we pray and then it’s over. (Tynesha, 02-01-02)

Sometimes we don’t…like if we get there early enough we can talk, but after
that usually during practice, we’re not supposed to be socializing, we’re
supposed to just practice…we practice and then afterwards we can talk. Cause
if we start talking, she’ll just start the music over and over and over again until
we stop, and then we get tired of doing it so we just end up shutting up.
(Tynesha, 02-11-02)

Tynesha has also gained a positive female role model from her involvement in the
dance program at Friend Church. She speaks very highly of the dance instructor:

She’s nice, she makes sure we get the dance before we go out there instead of
just having it half done, she makes sure it be right or if it’s not gonna be right,
we’re not gonna do it at all. (Tynesha, 02-11-02)

Tynesha appreciates the quality of instruction she is receiving. She doesn’t want to
work hard at something only to be embarrassed during a performance. Tynesha likes
the effort her instructor puts into making sure all the participants are learning the
routines well. She also feels her instructor is motivating, as evidenced by the
comment; “Yeah, sometimes, sometimes, I don’t feel like dancing….And she’ll be
like ‘get into it’ and I’ll be like ‘yeah’” (Tynesha, 02-11-02). Through Friend
Church, and the people who volunteer their time Tynesha has a place where she feels good about being involved in organized physical activity.

School

Tynesha’s experience in two different physical education classes, at two different schools, has significantly influenced her opinions of physical education and physical activity. Tynesha described her first physical education program, PE 1, as a positive experience, and PE 2 as negative. Tynesha was active in PE 1 and very inactive in PE 2, frequently sleeping through the class period. When I asked Tynesha about this, she explained that this was “[because] we didn’t have to do nothing in PE 2…So that’s why I liked PE 1 better…Cause I like doing the stuff when we have to do it” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha’s participation and enjoyment was influenced by the structure and attitudes of these two different physical education settings.

Tynesha’s first experience in physical education at the high school level (PE 1) was in an organized and structured class. Tynesha described the instructor’s academic and participation expectations of the students.

he’d take attendance and then he’d tell us the activity of the day and then he’d end it and we’d go to the locker room…We’d sit down and then he’d tell us what we were doing tomorrow or he would say how was the day or what was the scores and then we would go to the locker room and change clothes and then we’d go. (Tynesha, 03-04-02)

In addition to a constant structure, her teacher offered a wide variety of activities. Tynesha described the content as:

archery, and scooting and jump rope. We did it with like two strings but we made it like this, and then we had like five, like one person in the middle and then five on the outside, or four, and at the end it was four people. It was fun cause I had never seen that before. And he got out his book so we did that, it was pretty fun. (Tynesha, 03-04-02)
Tynesha also described a few attributes of her PE 1 teacher she found admirable; “he’s active. It was fun, he got into the activities, which was fun...he played jump rope and stuff with us too” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). She appreciated the instructor’s personal involvement and liked that he held them accountable for what they learned in his class:

Um, at first he gave out the rules and stuff. We had to know all the rules, for like archery you had to know all the rules like don’t put your hand here, stuff like that, we had to know all the rules before we got to do it and then afterwards we took a test on it. At first we did all the rules and then we took a test over it, and then we did it and took another test over it. So that’s how he did it. You had to learn all the basics of it, take a test, and you had to pass it, with a “B” or Higher or we couldn’t do the activities, then we’d do the activities, and we’d take a test to see if we remembered it. So I thought that was pretty cool. (Tynesha, 03-04-02)

Tynesha enjoyed her PE 1 experience stating she liked to “…be there, have fun…it was like my favorite class...I’m like ‘gym time’...they’re like ‘you’re going to gym’...I’m like ‘yeah’” (Tynesha, 02-11-02).

One reason for Tynesha’s enthusiasm for PE 1 was because she could perform the skills:

At first I didn’t know how to do it, I thought I was gonna shoot, and I kept shooting and I was like ‘yeah, I’m pretty good, I wanna keep shooting, I wanna do this again’…

The teachers at this school discussed the benefits of physical activity in both health and physical education classes: Tynesha noted “…yeah, they talked about the whole thing, they sat us down and we had health and then you went to gym and so, they talked about the importance [of physical education and exercise]” (Tynesha, 02-11-
02). This class helped Tynesha gain an appreciation for the importance of participating in physical activity.

Tynesha portrays her second physical education experience in high school (PE 2) much more negatively:

You’d go change clothes. You’d go, you’d go to sleep and then the bell rings and we’d go change clothes back and you’d go to classes...we didn’t have to do nothing. The study hall people basically played, they played basketball, but we didn’t do nothing, and then after a while, like the second semester, I noticed that the teacher wasn’t really paying attention if we dressed or not, so I didn’t dress at all. (Tynesha, 03-04-02)

Tynesha’s PE 2 instructor not only failed to impose consequences on her students, but set up no standards by which to judge her students’ performances. Tynesha seemed to be aware of her teacher’s lack of commitment to the academic aspect of physical education and did not find any attributes that she admired in her PE 2 instructor.

When I asked her if she liked her PE 2 teacher she replied, “NOPE. She was never in the classroom. She was either going to the office or telling somebody stories...in her office, she wasn’t even in the gym” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha stated that the teacher only attempted to evaluate students at the start of the semester according to whether they changed clothes or not, but “then after a while you didn’t even have to change. You could go to sleep”. Thus Tynesha not only stopped getting changed for physical education class, but she never even set foot into the gymnasium, as she was able to sleep in the locker room.

I asked Tynesha if she had noticed any changes in herself between PE 1 and PE 2 that caused her to not want to participate. She replied “no, I would have participated if she would have had something to do, but she didn’t so I wasn’t gonna
complain (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha’s experience in her second physical education class has negatively affected her belief about physical activity. Yet, Tynesha earned an “A” in both classes.

Friends

Tynesha has two people (aside from her sister) whom she considers friends, Janet, and Usher, her brother’s best friend. Both are involved in track at her high school (Tynesha, 02-11-02), but they don’t exert much influence over Tynesha’s opinions about physical activity. Perhaps this is due to the fact that her relationship with her friends has never been centered on physical activity. Tynesha rarely even discusses the subject with her friends. She comments that, “we don’t talk about exercising... (rolls her eyes)” because:

...It’s not like a normal conversation you’re gonna have...Say “hi, how was your day, I got this bad homework” Nobody says “man, exercise was hard yesterday”...well sometimes when you talk to the basketball players, they be like, “they made me run around the school two times, I was tired”. Like stuff like that, but other than that we usually don’t talk about it unless it was after a game or something, and they talk about practice, like the basketball players and stuff. (Tynesha, 02-11-02)

Tynesha does not appear to be easily influenced by her friends. I asked her if she would be more likely to join track if more of her friends were participating in it and she responded with a firm “No” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). In addition, she already has plans to increase her level of physical activity once she leaves her current social circle and arrives at college next fall:

...that’s why I [want to be] real active during college. I want to try to...get active into sports, get to activities, just try something. Cause I gotta another four years to go. I was like “yeah, I’m gonna change this around”. “I wanna be active in college”. And my friends is like “Mmmmmmm”. I was like “I am, watch”. (Tynesha, 03-04-02)

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The factors presented in Tynesha’s case were repeated time after time in interviews with and observations of her, and the writing activities she completed for this study. Family, Church, School, and Friends create the context of Tynesha’s beliefs about physical activity.

**Function of Physical Activity**

Physical activity plays three major roles in the life of Tynesha: a means to achieve her desired physical appearance, functions as a social role (spectator, time with family and friends), and as a form of transportation.

*Functions as a Means to Achieve Desired Appearance*

Physical activity functions as a means for Tynesha to achieve her desired appearance. She values physical activity for aesthetic reasons. This is illustrated by Tynesha’s statement that physical activity is important: “…you don’t want to be overweight…” (Tynesha, 02-11-02). Tynesha realizes that physical activity is helpful in maintaining a healthy weight, but her belief that it is aesthetically important goes much further. Being fit is one of Tynesha’s criteria for defining attractive people. Tynesha describes a person she thinks of as classy and beautiful as a “hot momma.” When I asked her what a “hot mamma” was she responded, “a hot mamma would be somebody in shape. They go put on their clothes, look cute, and look…professional. That’s what I call a hot mamma” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). A “hot mamma” cannot achieve “hot mamma” status unless she is in shape.

Tynesha wants to be a “hot mamma.” She spoke about joining a gym in the future saying; “I’m gonna work out, because I’m gonna be a hot mamma” (Tynesha, 164)

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02-21-02). Tynesha equates working out with being a “hot mamma.” She cannot achieve her own standard of attractiveness without participating in physical activity.

Despite her opinion that fitness is part of what constitutes beauty, Tynesha makes it clear that it is possible to take fitness too far, thereby negating whatever pulchritude can result from physical activity. During one of my interviews with Tynesha we looked at and discussed a series of pictures portraying women with varying degrees of muscularity. One of the pictures I presented was of a professional female bodybuilder. Tynesha did not refer to the body builder as a “hot mamma.” I asked her if she thought the woman in the photograph had too much muscle. She responded affirmatively and went on to say that she thought guys would “be scared of her” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). Tynesha responded to a picture I showed her of several women, less muscular, but engaging in fitness activities saying, “...they’re all hot mammas because they look happy and they’re working out...” (Tynesha, 03-04-02). She viewed the smiles of the women in the picture as resulting from their involvement with physical activity. For Tynesha physical activity is a necessary part of looking good.

Functions as a Means for Tynesha to be Social:

Physical activity functions as a means for Tynesha to be social by spectating at sporting events. It also allows her to spend time with her family and friends.

Spectator

Tynesha enjoys spectating at both formal and informal sporting events. She frequently spends her lunch period in the gymnasium watching the male students play pick-up games of basketball. I asked her if she ever played with them and she replied,
"No...I just watch them...we just sit up there and talk and watch them be goofy"
(Tynesha, 02-01-02). This statement implies that Tynesha is talking with friends, not solely focusing on the games being played. Tynesha also enjoys watching sports for the sake of the sports themselves as evidenced during our conversation about the Inner City Games:

T: Me and my sister we went to the Inner City Games last year.
K: Inner City Games?
T: Yes.
K: You go to that during the summer?
T: Yes it was part of the activities planned for the rec center we attended over the summer (Tynesha, 03-04-02).

Tynesha and her sister go together to organized sporting events for the purpose of acting as spectators. Certainly, Tynesha could spend time with friends at the Inner City Games, but she doesn’t mention them or indicate any type of social activity in regard to this event. But whether Tynesha likes to spectate at sporting events because of the opportunity they provide for social interaction, or simply because she wants to watch sports, being a spectator is one way in which she remains involved with physical activity.

*Time with Family and Friends*

Physical activity provides ample opportunity for Tynesha to share her time and interests with family and friends. She refers several times to informal physical activities her family do together. On Sundays, after church, Tynesha’s family will routinely share a meal and, weather permitting, spend the afternoon together at a local park:
Yes...my mom usually cooks dinner we all sit around the table and eat or when it’s warm outside we [would] go and play at the park or something...[Swing] on swings, and then I like to challenge my brothers to a game of basketball to show them what I really know...(Tynesha, 02-01-02)

Even when it comes to organized as opposed to informal sports, Tynesha largely participates because she can do so with her sister. I asked her what she thinks she will enjoy about running track and she replied “Mmm probably [challenging] my sister, she likes to run” (Tynesha, 03-04-02).

Tynesha not only values the involvement of physical activity as a means to be with family and friends in the present, but predicts that she will “Hang out with Friends and Family” in five years (Second Writing Activity). This leisure time with family, particularly with her sister, will continue to involve Tynesha in informal physical activity in the future.

Form of Transportation

Physical activity, and walking in particular, serve a utilitarian function in Tynesha’s life, that of transportation. She explained to me that since her mother is usually working one or the other of her two jobs, she frequently walks to participate in extracurricular activities. The dance instructor often gives Tynesha and her sister a ride home from dance practice (Tynesha, 02-01-02). In order to get to dance practice, they often take the bus downtown, but also choose to get dinner for themselves: Tynesha stated: “we just walk up [Joe] Street and we go to Subway cause Subway [is] on Joe Street so we go eat something” (Tynesha, 02-01-02). On the evenings of Bible Study, she arrives early for tutoring only if the church van can pick her up (Tynesha, 02-01-02).
Through walking, the amount of physical activity Tynesha receives each week increases. For example in order for Tynesha to participate in the Upward Bound Program, which is twice a week at Columbus State, she walks to the campus; a total of two hours of walking a week: “...and oh when we go to Columbus State, cause we have to get off the bus at Broad and then we walk to Cleveland down to Columbus State, so that’s a 30 minute walk” (Tynesha, 03-04-02).

Although Tynesha doesn’t always have a choice of whether she walks or not, she often makes a conscious decision to walk, even when transportation is available: ...

...if the weather is good, I walk anywhere. I don’t mind walking. Like if the weather be good, me and my sister and my brother, we’d probably walk home from school...It’s like a 45 minute walk. But when it’s warm outside, that’s good. I like walking. I just like walking. (Tynesha, 03-04-02)

Tynesha uses physical activity as a means of transportation both out of necessity (on occasion) and enjoyment. Either way the weekly amount of time she spends doing physical activity is increased.

In summary, physical activity functions in three major ways in the life of Tynesha. She utilizes physical activity as a way to achieve a desired appearance, as a way to interact socially with both family and friends, and sometimes as a means of transportation. These functions were repeated time and time again in the data obtained from Tynesha.

Case Four: Sara

Sara is sixteen years old and describes herself as being nice, smart, funny, caring and trustworthy (Writing Activity; and Sara, 3-5-02). Physically Sara describes herself as 5 feet 11 inches, not very active, a medium build, and dresses like a girl the
majority of the time, but occasionally dresses like a guy. Sara lives with her mother and her younger brother who is six years old. Her father passed away three years ago. Sara’s mother went to college and presently works full time at an accounting service. Her mother usually leaves the house after she gets Sara’s brother on the bus and returns around 6:00 p.m. Due to the family structure and her mother’s work schedule, Sara has family responsibilities including weekly chores and taking care of her brother after school which limits after school activities. Sara describes her socioeconomic status as middle class. I asked Sara if she would want her life to be like her mother’s. She responded, “in some ways I do and in some ways I don’t” (Sara, 03-05-02). Sara explained, “one thing that I would change, I wouldn’t want to be a single parent, and I know that’s kind of hard” (Sara, 03-05-02).

Sara estimated that she spends approximately 8-10 hours a week at Friend Church participating in activities and services including: the dance program, Bible Study, tutoring and Sunday services. Sara is involved in an Art Program on Saturday’s at a local college. Her grandmother signed her up for this and donated the $500.00 because of Sara’s love for art.

Sara’s high school, Pansy High School, consists of 1130 students. Twenty-one percent of the students were on free and reduced lunch at the time of the study. The school is comprised of 81% Black students, 14.5% White and non-minority students, 3.5% Asian students, 1% Spanish students, and 0 American Indians. Sara’s school day presently consists of: ceramics, home economics (On Your Own), community service and Spanish classes. This is Sara’s second community service course, as she is working hard to fulfill this requirement as early as possible in her school career.
Sara described her community service responsibility as going to a classroom and
taking attendance for that teacher (Sara, 03-05-02). Sara’s favorite class this semester
is ceramics. She sees a relationship between her ceramics class and a class titled On
Your Own, and what she will do in the future:

Probably ceramics and. Like what I would do in my future or whatever.
Probably like On Your Own, and ceramics or whatever because what I want to
do when I get older I wanna do something like architecture or something like
graphic with computers or something like that and On Your Own would
probably teach me how to like be on my own when I get out of school, and
how to survive like by myself. (Sara, 03-05-02)

Sara is in school from 7:30 – 2:30 Monday through Friday and doesn’t spend much
time on homework this semester. Last semester she dedicated 2 or 3 hours an evening
to her schoolwork (Sara, 3-5-02). Sara’s grades are consistently “A’s” and “B’s”. Her
Spanish teacher, Ms. Daniels, stated that Sara is “on the ball” in her class, and has a
“sunny personality” (Ms. Daniels, 04-18-02). Sara predicts that in five years she will
be in college studying architecture, graphic design or dentistry and that in ten years,
she hopes she will be out of school and practicing her desired line of work (Second
Writing Activity).

Involvement in Physical Activity

Sara defines physical activity as, “doing anything physical that is an activity”
(First Writing Activity). Sara participates in the dance program at Friend Church two
hours per week and this was her only physical activity for the week. In addition, she
walks to the bus stop each day (approximately ½ mile each way) to get her younger
brother, and predicts that she engages in a total of 4.5 hours of physical activity a
week. Sara first participated in formal physical activity at the age of 12 through her
church. Sara did not participate in any other formal physical activity aside from school physical education, which she had the semester before this study. Informally, she used to play basketball with her father before he passed away.

Perceptions of Physical Activity

Sara’s perceptions of physical activity are negative and neutral. She sees physical activity as an arena where people joke and make fun of one another. She also sees physical activity as an important part of a healthy lifestyle, but views such activity as unrealistic for her current lifestyle.

Arena in Which People Joke and Make Fun of Each Other

Sara’s past experiences with physical activity have often served to deflate her level of self-confidence. As a result she views physical activity as an arena where people joke and make fun of each other, especially when she has to perform skills or games she doesn’t know how to perform:

Sometimes, like um, like say if we’re standing in line for something like for basketball I really don’t like to play it in front of boys...basketball, I don’t know how to play basketball and a lot of people think since you’re tall you should know how to play and I don’t like basketball personally, I just don’t and like a lot of boys, they don’t like for the girls to play because they say girls don’t know how to play, because they say that we don’t know how to play...(Sara, 01-29-02)

Sara has developed an aversion to playing basketball in front of boys. She also feels like she can’t live up to the stereotypes associated with being tall (5’11) and the expectation that you should be playing basketball. Sara talked about her negative experiences with volleyball in physical education class: nobody liked me on their team [volleyball] because they said I was too heavy-handed so they’d tell me to sit down. So, I don’t really, I don’t really like volleyball. I like softball” (Sara, 02-12-
The fact that nobody liked having Sara on their team in volleyball negatively influenced her participation in the activity and her opinion of the sport.

Sara perceives physical activity as a domain in which individuals continuously make fun of her. Even those Sara refers to as friends apparently use her involvement in physical activity as a way to make fun of her. When I asked her if she'd learned anything about healthy lifestyles from her friends she replied “if you call a fat joke healthy lifestyles, then um [yes]...” (Sara, 03-05-02). Sara mentioned that guys make fun of girls at school, both inside and outside of the gymnasium, and that most of the time teachers “don’t pay no attention” (Sara, 03-05-02). Sara responded to many of the people who make fun of her in the following manner:

So I think a few people feel stupid like like if they call you big or something I’ll be like “I just woke up this morning and I didn’t realize, you taught me, thank you”. I told this one boy that and he was just sitting there looking dumb while I [said that]. So. (Sara, 03-05-02)

Important But Unrealistic

Because Sara’s mother works full time Sara has many responsibilities at home including daily chores and baby-sitting her younger brother. She describes her typical afternoon as:

Um, usually after my school day, I usually go home and do my chores or do partially my homework if I don’t have tutoring that day, and um at 3:40 or 3:45 I’ll go pick up my brother from the bus stop which is right down the street...not very far, like a block or two away...(Sara, 01-29-02)

Sara helps her brother get settled in at home and says that “he usually watches cartoons till my mom gets home because he doesn’t have homework so I usually do mine or we’ll just watch t.v. if I don’t have homework” (Sara, 01-29-02). Sara's
mother is a single working mother and this creates many limitations regarding Sara’s ability to participate in organized physical activities. Last year Sara belonged to a Show Choir at school (program involving singing and dancing), but was unable to continue her participation because she and her mother had too much difficulty rearranging the family schedule to accommodate this activity:

Cause my mom has school and I had dance rehearsals or whatever and then I would miss my rehearsals because she would have a final or something like that and then my teacher would get mad at me and I would be like “well, I can’t help it”. She’s like “well” she was like ‘we could arrange for you to get a ride’, well you could arrange for me to get a ride but you can’t arrange for me and my brother to get a ride and get back home. (Sara, 02-12-02)

Sara is aware that, although she may be able to find transportation to and from after school activities, it would also be necessary for arrangements to be made for her younger brother. If Sara’s brother were old enough to take care of himself, she would have more freedom to participate in organized physical activity. At this point in her life, however, she feels that, while physical activity is important, it is not something she can realistically devote a lot of time to. She is too dependent on her mother for transportation. When I asked Sara if it would be possible for her mother to juggle the family schedule in order to allow her to be involved in after-school activities during the week. Sara’s response was a definitive “No. I don’t think that she could handle that” (Sara, 03-05-02).

The busy schedule of Sara’s family also influences their diet.

…but it’s like if we wanna lose the weight, we can, or whatever but it’s like we’re so busy during the day that we don’t even try. And like when you’re hungry or whatever, say you haven’t eaten on a day or whatever instead of like eating a salad or something, you’re not thinking about no salad...You’re gonna grab a sandwich from McDonald’s or something like that. And it’s like when we’re going all week, that’s all we have time to do. (Sara, 02-12-02)

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Sara wants to eat healthy foods. She understands what does and does not constitute a healthy diet. The demands on her time, however, make it very difficult to consistently maintain nutritional eating habits. Sara again seems to be indicating her belief that a healthy lifestyle is important but views it as unrealistic in its actual application to her life.

The assertion that Sara is unable to lead as healthy a life as she would like due to the fact that she is the daughter of a single working mother, and therefore is without means of transportation and freedom from a large number of household responsibilities, gained further proof when she described how her life was different when her father was alive. She shared with me that she and her father used to attend the gym where her mother works, but that she no longer has the means to go: “...we don’t go no more, I don’t know why. My mom stopped going cause she’s had to work overtime and stuff, so we never have time to go” (Sara, 02-12-02). Even though Sara seems to have enjoyed working out at the gym, it is no longer a realistic part of her life.

Despite Sara’s relative inability to be involved in a variety of organized sports and physical activities, she still believes that it is an important aspect of living a healthy life:

Well, I really don’t have time for it cause I’m like real busy and whatever, so I really don’t think about it, but sometimes I do like that’s why on Monday’s that’s my exercise really because I know I’m not gonna be home for the rest of the week, so. (Sara, 02-12-02)

One of the reasons Sara looks forward to dance practice on Monday nights is because she knows it will provide most of her exercise for the week. Sara loves dance, and
values the physical work out it offers as well. I also asked Sara how her life would change if she had complete freedom of transportation. She answered, “I would be in a sport like at school or something like that” (Sara, 03-05-02).

Sara accepts the restrictions of her life with regard to physical activity without complaint. She doesn’t resent her mother for being unable to provide transportation to numerous activities or her brother for requiring so much of her attention after school. Still, Sara feels that she would like to participate in a greater number of organized physical activities if doing so were ever a goal she could realistically achieve.

Time and time again the information collected on Sara indicated that she views physical activity as an area in which people joke and make fun of each other, and as an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Yet, she also perceives many barriers to achieving a healthy lifestyle and considers increasing her level of physical activity unrealistic.

Sources Influencing Beliefs About Physical Activity

Sara primarily draws upon her family and her church for her beliefs about physical activity.

Family

Sara’s father passed away three years ago. Prior to his death he attended a gym and played basketball with his friends and with Sara on the Army base: “...So they have a gym like, I don’t know where, it’s on the base, but we’ve been there before because we used to play basketball with my dad when we used to go to the gym…” (Sara, 2-12-02). Sara’s experiences in physical activity were much more positive with her Dad than at school. I asked Sara what it was like when she and her
father and brother would go to the gym and play basketball. She described a much more enjoyable situation than the one she experienced at school: “...he just wanted me to play with him or whatever, he just didn’t have nobody, me and my brother would play, we’d be on a team and he’d be on a team, but it was just for fun” (Sara, 03-05-02). I asked Sara what she thought made this particular experience fun and she responded; “the fact that it was just us playing together...nobody criticizing, I mean it was just all fun” (Sara, 03-05-02). I later asked Sara why she no longer enjoys physical activity as she did when she played with her father and she expressed that she has simply lost interest in it (Sara, 03-05-02).

Sara’s father also influenced her eating habits. He was a vegetarian, and Sara correlated being vegetarian with losing weight. I asked Sara if she were to go on a diet what she thought it would entail and she responded:

No starches or carbohydrates. That’s mostly the things that make you gain weight. Is starches and stuff like that, well we would probably eat like, like chicken and stuff like that, fish, and like salads and fruits and vegetables. Cause I’ve lost weight like that cause my dad was a vegetarian. (Sara, 03-05-02)

Sara’s mother, who she describes physically as, “...like, she’s not skinny...” (Sara, 02-12-02), has, in the past, participated in both organized and informal physical activities. Sara recalls her mother telling her she was active in college: “She was on like in college they had like a little not, I can’t say drill team, but it was like a drill team with cheerleading mixed together” (Sara, 2-12-02). Sara also reminisced about occasions when she and her mother were physically active together during Sara’s youth:
Me and my mom used to do that when it was like me and her, my brother wasn’t here. We used to go and do that, I’d ride my bike and we’d meet at the end of the trail. It took a good two hours to walk the four-mile trail. (Sara, 02-12-02)

Sara’s mother presently shows her support of Sara’s involvement in physical activity by providing transportation to and from the dance program at Friend Church. Sara also mentioned that her mother often stays and watches the practices (Sara, 02-12-02). Sara also feels confident that her mother would help pay if costs were associated with any physical activities she wanted to play (Sara, 03-05-02).

Despite Sara’s opinion that her mother does what she can to demonstrate support for her daughter’s physical activities, she and her mother do not typically talk about physical education or physical activity. When I asked Sara about this she replied, “we don’t really talk about gym because I don’t like gym” (Sara, 02-12-02). I asked Sara what her mother thought about physical activity and the importance of living a healthy lifestyle, she said, “I don’t really know cause it’s like me and my mom like we’ll say we’ll go on a diet, but we don’t (Sara, 02-12-02). Apparently, the inability of Sara’s mother to follow through with dietary efforts also makes it hard for Sara to assess her mother’s opinion as to the value of a healthy lifestyle.

It should be noted that Sara does not recall her mother being as encouraging of her as she is of her brother with regard to participation in organized childhood sports. She does, however, remember that her mother “encouraged [her] to get outside and play” (Sara, 03-05-02).

Sara’s brother is six years old and is very active. He has played t-ball, plays soccer, likes to bowl, and is a good swimmer. The fact that he and Sara are two
children of a single mother and Sara is so much older than her younger brother naturally leads to an increase in Sara’s physical activity due to her child-care responsibilities. In addition, Sara’s younger brother is involved in a bowling league, so this invites a time for her family to spend time together and bowl (Sara, 02-29-02).

Church

For Sara, Friend Church helps her form beliefs about physical activity. The church is a place where Sara spends a great amount of time each week, approximately 8-10 hours. In addition, Sara’s favorite day of the week is Tuesday’s, due in part to the fact that she “get[s] to come to church” (Sara, 01-29-02) on that particular day. When I asked Sara how she has learned about different opportunities to be physically active, she responded; “like through church and that’s mostly where I’m at most of the time so that’s mostly all the places I do dance at (Sara, 02-12-02). In addition to learning about the opportunities for physical activity through Friend Church, Sara also feels that her involvement in dance enhances her social status stating; “cause like if I wasn’t in dance group, I wouldn’t know like a lot of people here” (Sara, 02-12-02).

Through her church Sara has discovered an activity which, though constituting her primary physical activity each week, also allows her to be social, and for which she has developed a strong passion. Since she has already indicated that she only puts maximum effort into things she enjoys, it is fortunate that she has an outlet that allows her to explore her interest in dance.
The two major sources of influence on Sara’s beliefs about physical activity are her family and Friend Church. These were supported throughout my conversations with Sara and the writing activities she completed.

Function of Physical Activity

Physical activity serves two major functions in Sara’s life. First, it fulfills a school requirement at Pansy High School. Second, it serves as a venue where she can explore her interest in dance.

Venue for Fulfilling Physical Education Requirement

Physical activity meets a graduation requirement for Sara at Pansy High School. Physical education class is “an hour of not having fun at all…” (Sara, 01-29-02). Sara’s negative attitude about physical education comes partly from the fact that she feels rushed from the time she arrives in the locker room: “we get changed, by the time you get changed, he’s already taking attendance downstairs, so by the time you get down there, you’re marked late and tardy, and it’s just…” (Sara, 01-29-02). Sara is exasperated by the unrealistic time frame in which she is required to get dressed for P.E. She feels that losing points is inevitable and she is consequently discouraged from putting forth a good effort. In addition to her frustration with feeling hurried, Sara also dislikes the time of day her class is offered:

“I like gym, but I don’t like the fact that I have it before lunch, it’s just I feel so nasty...I think it should be an end of the day thing so you could just go home and take a shower”. (Sara, 02-12-02)

Yet, regardless of her irritation with various aspects of her physical education class, Sara still feels it is important to dress and participate whenever possible; “yeah, I get dressed for everything if I’m there...which very rarely I’m not there”(Sara, 01-29-02).
Not only does Sara attend school almost every day, but she also attends her physical education class. She does what she can to participate and receive credit.

The fact that she views participation as important is further illustrated by her attempts to distinguish herself from many of the other females in her class; “well, I just wanna get my credit...I don’t want to be like the rest of the girls that just get dressed and sit on the side-line and don’t get no credit” (Sara, 01-29-02). Although Sara doesn’t want to be associated with the girls who do not participate, it is clear that she only participates for academic credit and not out of enjoyment. Even though Sara participates daily, the degree of her effort is based on her enjoyment of the activity “...it depends on what it is, like if I’m not really into it, I’m not really going to put my all into it” (Sara, 01-29-02). Sara is willing to attend physical education class daily and dress for participation, yet does not necessarily express enthusiasm for physical activity in her school setting.

Another barrier to Sara’s enjoyment, and thus her participation, is playing sports, in particular basketball, in front of boys. Sara feels that because she is tall, her peers, and particularly her male peers expect her to be skilled in the sport of basketball. She also noted that once the boys realize that the girls are not as skilled or as familiar with the sport as they would prefer, they no longer encourage or invite girls to play (Sara, 01-29-02).

Sara described a typical day of physical education class:

we do half and half so the first half an hour, like half of the class plays and the second half an hour another half...so, the other second half is just sitting in the bleachers the whole half, so they don’t want to play. (Sara, 01-29-02)
From this description, Sara implies that much of her dissatisfaction with physical education results from the large amount of "down time" during which the students do nothing.

*Explore Interest In Dance*

Unlike her physical education class, Sara believes she puts full effort into dance each week. She shared with me that she gets a good workout from dance, increases her heart rate, and sweats (Sara, 01-29-02). Sara looks forward to dance practice each week "cause I know that is my exercise [for that week]" (Sara, 02-12-02). Her value of dance simply for the sake of exercise is further highlighted by her response to my question pertaining to whether or not she enjoyed dance for social reasons. Sara answered "the social too, but for the activity" (Sara, 03-05-02). Physical activity is a way for Sara to relax and have fun. She often becomes annoyed with her peers "...who just take the fun out of it by talking to people, gossiping all the time" (Sara, 01-29-02).

Another frustration is that she doesn’t always feel that she gets instruction on how to improve her dancing: "...It makes me mad because like nobody will teach me the things that I am missing, and so I’ll stop, I mean, why practice the same thing over and..." (Sara, 02-12-02). It is interesting to note that although Sara feels that she gets a good workout from dance practice, she is also frustrated with the fact that she doesn’t get the instruction she desires. I had the opportunity to observe Sara at dance practice on two occasions (2-13-02, 3-06-02). On both occasions, I noted that many of the girls were inactive. During the first session I watched, the girls practiced the routine individually, one by one, for approximately one hour. This left the remaining
seven members of the dance group sitting and watching. This similar routine occurred again on March 6, 2002. I noted: Four people are dancing, practicing their routine. The other seven are standing and watching (Observation notes, 3-6-02).

Sara’s zeal for dance is best met by a structured approach to the activity. This is part of her dance program she wishes were more consistent. She complained about the irregularity of the practice schedule:

...so I’ll just sit there like...and then everybody wants to know what’s wrong with me, well, nobody’s teaching me to dance and like at the time it was like Christmas break and then they had Martin Luther King Day, we never, we didn’t have practice for a good three times, and I like, dance like slipped out of my head. (Sara, 02-12-02)

Sara values a high degree of structure. When I asked her if she thought her dance program was structured she responded:

...Yeah, yeah it is but like part is like informing people of things like something like they cancelled practice on Monday, nobody called you till you’re about to leave or you’re already at church, you get the message later on, you go be like I go home and you be mad like, it’s just like information people not getting messages and things like that, nobody calling... (Sara, 03-05-02)

Sara’s use of the word “mad” to describe her reaction to the poor communication between the people involved in the dance program indicates how much she values participating in this particular physical activity. My field notes on two occasions (2-25-02, 5-13-02) supported Sara’s belief that the communication lines with regard to the dance program often broke down. On two separate occasions, I drove to dance practice, found members of the dance group there, but quickly learned that dance was cancelled.
Physical activity functions in two major ways in Sara’s life. First, and
unavoidably, it fulfills a school graduation requirement. Second, it provides a venue
through which she can explore her interest in dance. These themes arose repeatedly
from the data collected from and about Sara.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the lives of four African American female adolescents regarding their involvement in and perceptions of physical activity, the sources of their beliefs about physical activity, and how physical activity functions in their lives.

This chapter presents a cross case analysis of the findings by research question. The research questions chosen for the study attempted to gain insight into the perceptions of and experiences with physical activity in the lives of four African American adolescent females. It was hoped that the information gained from these research questions would uncover themes relating to how much these females participated in physical activity, what types of physical activity they enjoyed, what their perceptions of physical activity were, how it functioned in their lives, and who or what influenced their beliefs about physical activity. An understanding of these themes will aid in determining appropriate programs in school and community settings that will enable more African American adolescent females to engage in and enjoy physical activity. The similarities and differences among the girls’ responses to
each research question are explored. The cross case analysis is followed by a series of conclusions and implications and then recommendations for future research.

Cross Case Analysis

A cross case analysis was performed to determine similarities and differences among case studies relative to the research questions and the ways in which these similarities and differences relate to the literature on African American female adolescents and physical activity and on gender in education and physical education. Four adolescent African American females served as the co-researchers in this study. This analysis is presented relative to each research question that guided the study.

R.Q. 1. What is the nature and scope of involvement in physical activity for these four African American females?

This section will look at how the girls defined physical activity and what their individual definition involved. I will then speak to the scope of involvement (time and intensity) for each co-researcher in the past and present. This will be related to the literature. The types of activities in which each co-researcher engaged are presented and looked at in terms of how they do or do not align with the literature.

Table 5.1 presents the definition of physical activity each co-researcher gave in their first writing activity. These definitions reflected their personal experiences with physical activity. Octavia, who at the time of the study appeared to have had the most structured experiences with physical activity, viewed physical activity as exercise and sports without mentioning specific health aspects. Sam had a passion for being physically active and it was enjoyable for her to be active and learn about sports. Tynesha’s take on the definition was more formal and she related it to what
she perceived as a positive aspect of physical activity, that of maintaining good health. Sara, who was the least active and enthusiastic about physical activity, was also the least specific in her definition, offering a description of physical activity so general as to include, “anything physical that is an activity”.

There were similarities among the definitions presented for three of the cases; however, there was no common theme consistent throughout all four case studies. Octavia, Sam, and Tynesha described physical activity in part as either exercise or a way to stay in shape. Sam and Tynesha referred to physical activity as something that can keep you in shape, but only Tynesha took this a step further and related it to specific health benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-Researcher</th>
<th>Definition of Physical Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Octavia</td>
<td>“a form of exercise, and any sport is physical activity”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>“keeping in shape and having fun learning new sports”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tynesha</td>
<td>“some activity that is physical that helps you stay healthy and in shape”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>“doing anything physical that is an activity”</td>
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Table 5.1: Co-researcher’s Definitions of Physical Activity from First Writing Activity.
Table 5.2: Co-Researcher’s Involvement in Present Formal and Present Informal Physical Activity and Past Physical Activity.

* Denotes informal past physical activity.

The data presented in table 5.2 suggests that each of the co-researchers were more active when they were younger than at the time of the study. This corresponds to research by Rowland (1990) that suggests an inverse relationship between physical activity and age, indicating that as youth get older, their physical activity levels tend to decrease. The data from this study suggest that reasons for the decline in

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Co-Researcher</th>
<th>At Time of Study Formal Physical Activity</th>
<th>At Time of Study Informal Physical Activity</th>
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<td>Octavia</td>
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participation in physical activity for the co-researchers include increased and changing responsibilities, and concerns that physical activity was interfering with their social lives. This is consistent with the literature by Corbin and Pangrazi (1999) that highlights various suggestions as to why declines in physical activity levels are so prevalent during the adolescent years including: decreased opportunities for participation in organized sport, increased access to automobiles, and social demands. Sara, for instance, is charged with the daily responsibility of baby-sitting her younger brother. This responsibility consumes her time and attention after school and seriously inhibits her access to formal physical activity and sport. If Sara’s family were in a different socioeconomic bracket, perhaps she would not have to deal with this particular barrier to physical activity, as suggested by Sallis, Simons-Morton, Stone, Corbin, Epstein, Faucette, et al. (1992) who indicated that both male and female adolescents from families with low socioeconomic status are more inactive than male and female adolescents from wealthier families. The issue of class is beyond the scope of what I, as a beginning researcher can say here and now. However, it seems critical that if this is an area I continue to research, I extend my readings and knowledge particularly with regard to issues of class, and more specifically issues of class in the African American community in order to assess the extent to which class affects physical activity levels among adolescent females. Sara’s lack of participation in physical activity can also be viewed from a gender perspective. Sara mentioned that her six-year old brother is very active and has participated in activities including: bowling, t-ball, soccer, and swimming. It seems
that Sara’s family is structured in such a way that her brother can participate in sports, but she cannot.

Sam, although the most physically active of the four co-researchers, had a part-time job. Although, she managed to juggle her schedule, it was quite a balancing act to meet the demands of organized physical activity and sport in addition to the demands of work, school, and family. Tynesha mentioned that she needed to get a job in order to pay for the expenses of attending her senior prom, a very important social function for many adolescent girls. A job would have interfered with Tynesha’s ability to participate in formal physical activities that meet on a daily basis. Also, organized sports and physical activities can be very costly. If Tynesha had to work in order to afford to go to her prom, then her financial situation might have limited her opportunity to be involved in certain sports or physical activities, as in order to have fully participated she would not have much time for a job. Although Octavia did not mention her family responsibilities or having to work, she spoke time and time again of how she did not want physical activity and sport to interfere with her social life. This was not always a concern of Octavia’s, but rather one that developed during her teenage years.

At the time of the study, each of the four co-researchers had previously participated in the dance program at Friend Church. In addition, all four co-researchers have participated in some form of dance. Not only is this type of physical activity similar among all four co-researchers, but also the primary opportunity for all of them to experience dance stems from their involvement in Friend Church. This was a common bond for these four girls, and a key component of their involvement in the
church. The church environment is a sacred environment for many in the African American community. Reverend Thunder explained that the African American Church is the foundation upon which most things for the church-going African American community rests. Indeed her comments illustrated that the church provides comprehensive support in all aspects of its member’s lives. It is the center of their family interactions and the center of their education. The inclusive learning process that Reverend Thunder spoke of expands to the physical activity realm as well. The type of dance that is predominantly practiced at Friend Church is Liturgical. Liturgical dance is “a deeply spiritual experience that should never be viewed as a performance or entertainment. Rather, it is a shared experience between the dancer and the people to ‘stir the souls’ of the congregation, lifting their hearts and spirits to the Lord” (Internet retrieval, 3-25-02). This spiritual experience was important to at least one of the co-researcher’s. Octavia specifically referred to how the disorganization of the program sometimes hindered her ability to enhance her relationship with God which was the primary reason she initially joined the dance program. Each of the four co-researchers spent two hours a week at Friend Church engaging in the dance program with other adolescents whom they often referred to as their “church friends”. All participants in the dance program were female and African American, with the exception of one African American male (Observation notes, 3-06-02). If we examine the involvement of the co-researchers in the dance program at Friend Church, we see that each chose to be involved in a non-competitive form of physical activity that would allow them to express themselves and where success is measured by the achievement of personal goals and group goals rather than by
individual skill level or number of wins in dance competitions. Even though the girls in this study appeared to enjoy a physical activity that was not measured by winning, they did value the importance of performing successfully in front of an audience. Octavia demonstrated this concept when she spoke of her frustration with the dance instructor for not having the girls ready to perform in front of church members. The girls valued the effort they put into practices and viewed successful performances as a reward for their effort. It appeared that competence was important while competition was not as important.

The critical cultural feminist view that the power of those in dominant positions in society is constantly contested (Birrell, 2000) is evident in this non-competitive, social and spiritual involvement with physical activity, for it is in opposition to traditional models of organized sport which value aggression and competitiveness.

The past experiences of Octavia, Sam, Tynesha, and Sara with regard to physical activity were predominantly activities stereotyped as “female” specific. Hoppes (1987); Lirgg & Feltz (1989); Steward & Corbin (1989); and Williamson (1993) urged that sex stereotyped sports such as baseball, football, and basketball be taken out of physical education curricula. In addition, Griffin (1984) recommended that, if we are to include these sports in our physical education classes, we do so in a non-competitive manner. Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin (2000) noted that many individuals and team sports are considered highly competitive and undesirable for many females, and that we need to create different learning experiences.
In their youth, both Sam and Octavia were cheerleaders and both participated in ballet and tap as forms of dance. Though Tynesha and Sara did not specify what type of dance they focused on in the past, they both indicated active involvement in that activity. Tynesha and Sam played tennis, and Sam and Octavia have been involved in softball. Softball is typically viewed as a White sport and was supported as such by both Sam and Octavia in their interviews. The status of their ethnicity as a minority within softball was not a factor for them with regard to their desire to play softball for their school teams. With the exception of basketball, track and swimming, all of the activities mentioned by the co-researchers are specific to females. Basketball and track, however, are largely associated with both male and female African American athletes.

The majority of the activities of choice for these four girls were individual dance and sports activities, and not team sports. Yet, Nilges (1998) suggested that too many of the present programs in physical education are based on team sports. Perhaps as physical educators we have placed too much emphasis on this curriculum. Even though the Sport Education Model (Siedentop, 1994) can be adapted for such activities as dance, it was designed for use with traditional individual and team sports. In addition to dance, other informal physical activities such as walking and perhaps even designing new physical activities need to be integrated into school curricula. Hutchinson (1995) and Williamson (1993) suggested that outdoor adventure be integrated into physical education programs and that we take time to develop new activities that would allow for students to have equal experiences.
Furthermore, if proficiency in skill level is going to continue to be a factor in who participates in what physical activities and in the grading rubrics of physical education classes, curricula need to include activities that can be performed at an individual pace. Both inside and out of school, activities in which adolescents can set their own pace, and in which success is judged both internally and externally by achieving personal goals as opposed to prescribed proficiency standards, may encourage many young people, especially African American females, to stay active.

R.Q. 2- What do these four African American adolescent females perceive as the positives and negatives associated with physical activity?

In all aspects of life, we as humans typically associate positives and negatives with all we encounter. This research question examined the positives, negatives and neutral perceptions of physical activity for each of the co-researchers. It is important to understand not only what the co-researchers, as African American adolescent females, perceived as positives and negatives of physical activity, but also how and why they developed those perceptions. Otherwise, physical educators cannot begin the process of developing curriculum that provide for the needs of this population. Table 5.3 illustrates the similarities and differences with regard to perceptions about physical activity for each of the four co-researchers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-Researcher</th>
<th>Positives</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Octavia</td>
<td>Important part of a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>Enervating as opposed to energizing</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not structured enough in her life, and therefore leads to a negative experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hindering to social life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Important part of a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rewarding</td>
<td>Fulfills need to be active and competitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tynesha</td>
<td>Important part of a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>Something that decreases self confidence</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Important part of a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>Arena in which people make fun of each other</td>
<td>Maintaining beneficial levels of physical activity is unrealistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Cross Case Analysis of Perceptions of Physical Activity (Positive, Negative or Neutral).

It is evident from the data presented in Table 5.3 that each of the four co-researchers perceived physical activity as being an important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. However, they differed on which aspects of a healthy lifestyle were important. Tynesha felt that physical activity assists in keeping people in shape so that they do not become overweight. In addition, she cognitively made the connection that a lack of exercise can lead to the development of unhealthy cells around one’s
heart. She also attributed a healthy diet to assisting in the process of achieving a healthy lifestyle.

Octavia, like Tynesha, recognized that physical activity is important because maintaining good health is important. She asserted that decreased levels of exercise can lead to increased body weight and attributed her own weight gain, and that of her mother, to the increasingly sedentary nature of their lifestyles (Octavia, 2-13-02).

Sam maintained that living a healthy lifestyle was not only important for her, but for others as well. Of the co-researchers, Sam had the best understanding of fitness and its importance. She was more concerned than the others about influencing other people to achieve fitness and good health, as evidenced by her attempts to coach, encourage, and facilitate others to participate in physical activity. Part of Sam’s concern for those who do not stay physically active was attributable to her view that a decrease in physical activity can cause an increase in weight gain and therefore the development of health complications (Sam, 2-13-02). Unlike Octavia, Tynesha and Sara, Sam made a conscious effort to incorporate physical activity into her life. She also tried to eat healthy foods. In addition, Sam was willing to workout alone if her friends were not available to join her. Sam also predicted that she would continue to be involved in physical activity in the future.

Sara recognized physical activity as beneficial to one’s health. Yet, she alone expressed the sentiment that participating in enough physical activity to benefit her health is an unrealistic, unattainable goal. She felt she had too little time and too many other responsibilities to dedicate more than a couple of hours weekly (usually at dance) to physical activity. In reality her family responsibilities were different than
those of the other co-researchers. Like Octavia and Tynesha, Sara is the daughter of a single working mother. Yet, of the three, only Sara is responsible for caring for a younger sibling after school. Octavia has no younger brothers or sisters, and Tynesha's siblings, though younger, are old enough to take care of themselves. They consequently had more freedom in choosing how to spend their time after school. If Sara wanted to participate in organized physical activity, either through her school or in the community, she simply would not have the freedom to do so. In fact, she gave up activities in the past due to conflicts between her family responsibilities and the practice schedule of the activity. However, the dance program at Friend Church meets only one day a week and can be juggled into her mother's busy schedule. On the other hand, a sports team, for example, would likely meet everyday and likely compete on weekends. Sam is the only other co-researcher with a younger sibling. Yet, her family structure is significantly different than Sara's in that she lives with both of her parents and, even after school, only shares the responsibility of taking care of her little brother. According to Sara, she is the sole provider of care and attention to her brother in the afternoon. With regard to having free time to devote to physical activity, especially organized physical activity, Sara faces the most restrictions. It is therefore not surprising that she alone expressed the attitude that engaging in beneficial amounts of physical activity is unrealistic for her lifestyle.

Each of the four co-researchers noted that they value the importance of being physically active, as it is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. However, none of the girls illustrated comprehensive knowledge of what a healthy lifestyle entails. It appears that the concept of the term healthy lifestyle has been "drilled" into their
heads through various sources, but the specific information they have learned is limited and bears little resemblance to the depth articulated in the content standards for a physically educated person (NASPE, 1995).

The National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) addressed the question “What should students know and be able to do?” This question was answered with the development of a definition of a physically educated individual. The definition addresses five major focus areas, describing a physically educated person as one who: has learned skills necessary to perform a variety of activities, is physically fit, does participate in regular physical activity, knows the implications and benefits of physical activity, and values physical activity and its contribution to a healthy lifestyle (NASPE, 1995). NASPE (1995) established seven content standards related to what students should know and be able to do. The seven content standards include: competency in many and proficiency in a few movement forms, applies concepts and principles to learning motor skills, physically active lifestyle, achieves and maintains health and fitness levels, demonstrates personal and social behavior in physical activity, has respect for differences among people in physical activity settings, understands physical activity provides opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression. There is a substantial knowledge gap between the National Standards for Physical Education for tenth and twelfth graders and what the four females in the study knew about physical activity. An example of one specific standard, that of gains respect for differences among people in physical activity settings lends itself as a nice fit for comparison to this study. Two suggested assessments for this content area are as follows: to examine factors that impact
physical activity engagement across the lifespan including gender, age, and class or to review offensive mascots (gender, ethnicity, culture). The four females in this study did not mention race, class or gender as factors that influenced their engagement in physical activity across the lifespan. This standard did not appear to be addressed in their physical education programs. By comparing the NASPE standards with regard to the seven content areas, the four females in this study are far from achieving the suggested goals for a physically educated person. This is quite alarming to me as a physical educator as one of my primary goals is to have my students achieve the standards as recommended by NASPE, and meet the definition of a physically educated person.

We, as educators, need to do more within schools to educate students not only on the benefits of physical activity and good nutrition, but also on why physical activity is important and on safe ways to achieve a healthy lifestyle. It is unreasonable to expect adolescents to design their own lifetime fitness plan without the foundation of knowledge to do it safely. From a critical cultural feminist perspective it is also important to assert that females and males have different physiological make-ups and therefore have different needs with regard to good health, nutrition, and physical activity habits. In light of their differences, adolescent females may not benefit from the same health and physical education curriculum as male adolescents. Education in these areas should be specific to the needs of both females and males, even if achieving this would involve developing and implementing two somewhat different curricula.
Although many of the perceptions of physical activity for these four females were positive, there were also negative perceptions as well. For example, a negative similarity among the four cases was the view of the co-researchers that physical activity needs to be structured. With regard to dance, all the co-researchers agreed that the program could be more organized. Octavia and Sara were the most adamant about the need for more organization in the dance program. They frequently disapproved of the sporadic practice schedule, the participants who didn't take the activity seriously and the shabby condition of the group with regard to performance readiness (Sara, 03-05-02; Octavia, 03-14-02). It appears that competence was also important to the co-researchers and not solely the fact that the activity provided them with an opportunity to be social. They each stated that they would enjoy dance more if it contained a greater degree of structure. To an extent, this relates back to Lund’s (1992) suggestion of accountability. Lund suggested that teachers must hold students accountable and lay out expectations for their students. Lund’s suggestion is appropriate not only for teachers, however, but for physical activity instructors and coaches outside the school setting as well. For example, the practice schedule of the dance program at Friend Church, according to the co-researchers, was sporadic and the group members were concerned about whether or not they were ready to perform. A more regular dance practice schedule would have improved the skills of the participants and better prepared them for performances in front of an audience. Yet, only the dance instructor could control the practice schedule. Even if the participants had practiced their skills at home on days they didn’t have formal practices, they could not be expected to reach their full potential or performance readiness without
instruction and practice as a group. The dance instructor must be held accountable for her responsibility in educating the group members and in helping them achieve their personal goals. One way the dance instructor could have more effectively held the members accountable would have been to have the participants in the dance program log practice hours completed at home. This may have motivated and encouraged the participants to practice, and thus inadvertently increased their physical activity levels. Although this was one possible solution, it seems clear that the most critical point is that the dance program required better management skills and planning by the instructor.

Sam was the least harsh in her assessment of the dance program’s level of organization. As the most active of the four co-researchers, she has had various experiences with organized physical activities. These experiences, combined with her high level of self-discipline, allowed her to draw upon an internal understanding of organized sports, thus enabling her to find more structure within the dance program than the others.

Tynesha was not as harsh as Octavia and Sara in her criticism of the dance program, nor was she as forgiving as Sam. She expressed displeasure with the irregularity of the dance program’s practice schedule. Tynesha’s enjoyment of dance as a physical activity, however, was not seriously hindered by the level of disorganization.

The fact that all four co-researchers felt the dance program could be more organized speaks to the idea that the benefits of this particular physical activity program were not effectively delivered, due to a lack of structure. Structure is
required in many types of physical activity, for example, children playing games at recess or after school cannot enjoy their activities if they all play according to different rules; or an individual who jogs in order to maintain cardiovascular fitness cannot achieve that goal if their running schedule is too sporadic. Octavia, Sam, Tynesha, and Sara all had personal reasons for joining the dance program, and they all had certain goals. Yet, they could not rely on the practice or performance schedules to be maintained, on receiving consistent individual instruction, or on everyone involved wanting to participate as opposed to socializing. Even if the co-researchers desired nothing more than to enjoy dancing in an organized fashion with their friends, they could not satisfy this desire when practice was cancelled two or three weeks in a row. Success in physical activity, for these girls, even personal as opposed to group success, demanded routine and structure.

An additional negative perception of physical activity for Tynesha and Sara was that it decreased their self-confidence. Tynesha mentioned that she had wanted to try out for track, specifically for hurdles, but immediately clarified this by stating her intention to throw the shot put instead because of her fear of knocking over all the hurdles. She further commented that shot put was a much easier activity, one at which she would be less likely to fail (Tynesha, 02-01-02). Sara alluded to examples in her physical education class when her classmates made fun of her playing basketball and volleyball, and both of these experiences caused her to want to stop participating in those activities. Although this was not a theme for Sam, she mentioned that she stopped running track because she was afraid to lose. In addition, she spoke of how females in her physical education class did not put forth effort out of fear that the
boys would ridicule them (Sara, 02-29-02, and 02-12-02). Sam’s physical education teacher also talked about how some of the girls in her physical education class were afraid to participate in certain activities because they did not wish to perform badly in front of the boys. She suggested that an all-girls physical education setting would help eliminate this problem (Ms. Tandy, 03-04-02). The data collected in this study indicated that these females did not necessarily fear being seen participating in an activity, but feared ridicule from boys regarding their skill level. Unfortunately, their skill levels are typically judged by a male standard, as supported by Nilges (2000).

R.Q. 3- Who or what are the sources that the four co-researchers draw upon to describe their beliefs about physical activity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Octavia</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Tynesha</th>
<th>Sara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Sources the co-researchers draw upon to describe their beliefs about physical activity.

Zakarian (1994) noted that among low SES urban adolescents, parental and friend/peer support were important in determining if youth are active. In addition, the Prevention Institute (2001) suggested that parental influence (are parents active? do...
they encourage the adolescent to be active) is a major determinant of a child's physical activity levels. In this study family was the major source of influence for each girl. For each co-researcher, however, this influence varied (see Table 5.4). All of the co-researchers indicated that their parents either were or would be supportive of their physical endeavors providing transportation and financial assistance (Interview #3). Although family was a source of their beliefs about physical activity, differences existed in the content of the messages they each received from their family. Tynesha repeatedly referred to the unconditional support of her family, particularly that of her mother (Tynesha, 3-04-02), while Octavia and Sam discussed how their mothers criticized their performances. Octavia and Sam were the most involved in formal sporting competitive environments. Sam, however, did not refer to this criticism when she talked about her dance experiences at Friend Church. In her case, her mother's critical comments were much more forth coming in a competitive sports environment.

Three of the co-researchers viewed the church as a second source of their beliefs about physical activity. Yet, their discussion of this theme was limited to recognitions of attempts made by their youth minister to discuss physical activity and health with them. Evidence presented in earlier chapters, however, indicates that the church is an integral part of the lives of these four females. With the exception of school, they all spent more time at church than at any other specific activity. Church was also a place where they shared time and joined in activities with their families. In addition, Reverend Thunder, the youth minister at Friend Church, was an African American female holding a key leadership position within the church. She served as a 203
role model for the co-researchers and imparted her view to them that physical activity is important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Sam commented about Reverend Thunder’s reminders to the youth to take care of their bodies (Sam, 3-06-02). In addition, according to Sam the church was also beginning to utilize programs to get families involved in various activities (Sam, 3-06-02). Friend Church provided Tynesha with the opportunity to learn dance. She referred back to the time when she wanted to become social in the church, but did not want to join choir, thus, dance seemed like a viable option. Although for Tynesha, it was the social attractor that initiated her interest in dance, if it were not for the dance program at Friend Church, Tynesha would not have experienced this particular physical activity. The Prevention Institute (2001) designates social interests in physical activity within the third domain of determinants (psychological/social and demographic). For Tynesha, it was a desire to be social at the church that drew her to dance. Sara noted that the church provided her with information about different opportunities to be physically active (Sara, 2-12-02). In addition, Sara said that her involvement in dance helped improve her social status and that being involved in dance assisted her in meeting new people she would not otherwise have known (Sara, 2-12-02). Again, if we look to the data, it was the desire to be social that played at least a part in Sara’s involvement in the dance program at Friend Church.

Friends was the third major source of influence for Octavia, Sam, and Tynesha. Although Sara did not directly draw upon her friends to describe her beliefs about physical activity I would argue that Sara’s peers at school (not necessarily her friends) influenced her beliefs about physical activity. Sara has had a very negative
experience in physical activity at school. Outside of school this had not always been the case. When Sara was younger and participated in basketball games with her father she had much more positive experiences. For Sara, physical education has been negative and this has had an influence on her beliefs about physical activity. It appears that Sara has learned at least two key points from her peers at school. First, being what they referred to as “fat” is not “cool”, and second, being less skilled in physical activities is not acceptable or okay. Sara shared with me some of the negative comments that have been directed at her during the year and revealed that her teachers did nothing to prevent or control this harassment. As educator’s, we must take responsibility and step in and dissect negative dialogue so that students who are being made fun of are not overlooked.

The majority of Sam’s friends are involved in sport. Sam referred to the fact that some of her friends tell her what physical activity she is good at and encouraged her to become involved in that particular activity (Sam, 3-05-02). This has served as a source that helps determine Sam’s beliefs about physical activity and her level of participation. For Sam, her friends’ encouragement has helped her first, determine what physical activities she is good at, and second, has helped her to feel good about herself with regard to particular physical activities. Friends have also influenced Tynesha’s beliefs about physical activity. However she was adamant about the fact that she would not be more likely to join a sport or physical activity if one of her friends was doing that particular activity. In addition, Tynesha expressed to me that it is not “normal” conversation for her friends to talk about physical activity (2-11-02).

Tynesha has learned that it is not appropriate, acceptable, or in her terms “normal” to
discuss physical activity among her peers. The paradox between Sam and Tynesha is interesting to note. Sam is very involved in sports, and so too are her friends. Thus, conversations about physical activity naturally arise. Although two of Tynesha’s friends are involved in the track program at her high school, she does not discuss track or physical activity with either of them.

Octavia clearly draws from her friends to help describe her beliefs about physical activity. All three of Octavia’s closest friends are involved in sports at her high school. From her friend Swoops, Octavia has learned about healthy eating habits, and from Armstrong she has learned about proper weight lifting techniques and practices. Her friend Fonda, while not frequently engaging in dialogue about physical activity, served as a role model to Octavia and was always active either at school or outside of school with her mother. The Prevention Institute (2001) noted that peer influence is a determinant to participation in physical activity, as was the case in this study.

As noted earlier, The Prevention Institute (2001) noted three domains of determinants of physical activity. One such domain is that of psychological/social and demographic. Included within this realm is gender socialization (how the media portrays gender and activity). Sam’s story illustrated that she was able to decipher the messages she received from the media. She was able to joke about the different unrealistic messages that were contained in advertisements on the television. However, she also alluded to the fact that the media was an influence in helping her choose a sport in which to participate. For example, both Williams sisters served as role models to Sam. Upon seeing them compete, she realized that she wanted to
become involved in tennis. Sam also made the connection that she has not seen many African American females in commercials. While the media did not prove to be a theme for any of the other co-researchers, Octavia urged that the media could do more to promote physical activity among adolescent females. She alluded to the fact that most people her age want to be a singer or actor because when singers and actors are illustrated on the television, the media simply highlights their attractiveness and the fame they receive from this profession. Octavia, on the other hand, felt that the media should share pictures with the public of those particular actors and singers working out and eating healthy. It seemed obvious to Octavia that much work and discipline is involved in maintaining an attractive body. It is her recommendation that we highlight more of what it takes to stay healthy within the media. The media is a determinant to physical activity (Prevention Institute, 2001), and it seems that more can be done to promote physical activity among youth.

Critical Cultural Feminists believe that the structure of society and the inequitable distribution of power within society is not just about men and women being equal in all aspects, but also demands that attention be directed toward what elements in society cause the structure to be inequitable. The co-researchers unfortunately furthered their oppression by not being aware of it. The unequal balance of power between men and women in society not only serves to oppress women, but also to oppress the very idea that women are oppressed (Birrell, 2000). The co-researchers are between 15 and 18 years of age, a very physically, emotionally, and socially unstable time (Pipher, 1994). They may not even notice if the males and females in their classes at school are graded according to the same
standard, much less whether or not that standard celebrates and reinforces male characteristics. A basic example of the inequalities that existed within the church environment is that the church offered dance for girls and basketball for boys. Although Reverend Thunder stated that in her opinion girls could be whatever they wanted to be, when it comes to sports, Friend Church appears to have prescribed gender roles for males and females. None of the girls ever mentioned that this was a concern of theirs' in the study. Sam did refer to the fact that the church should offer more activities (and various physical activities), but none of the four co-researchers spoke out on the fact that the church encouraged boys to participate in basketball and girls to participate in dance.

Reverend Thunder offered insight as to another way in which the co-researchers aided in their own oppression. She discussed the fact that the generation to which the co-researchers' parents belong, and especially the one to which their grandparents belong, has very clear ideas about appropriate gender roles for females. The older members of the church, and the older members of the girls' families set the rules the co-researchers followed. In fact, at Friend Church at least 25 percent of the members are above the age of 56. Octavia, Sam, Tynesha, and Sara cannot avoid being influenced by the values and beliefs of their parents and grandparents.

R.Q. 4- How does physical activity function in the lives of the four co-researchers?

Seven themes emerged with regard to the function of physical activity in the lives of the four girls. These included: physical education, social function, explore an interest in dance, fulfilling prescribed gender roles, desired appearance and self-
discipline, encouraging others, and the utilitarian function of transportation (see Table 5.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Octavia</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Tynesha</th>
<th>Sara</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
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<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Function</td>
<td>Social Function</td>
<td>Social Function</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Roles</td>
<td>Self-Discipline</td>
<td>Desired Appearance</td>
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<td>Encourages Others</td>
<td>Utilitarian function of Transportation</td>
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Table 5.5: Function of Physical Activity in the Lives of the Co-researchers.

Octavia, Sam, Tynesha, and Sara have all participated in school physical education classes, which is a requirement of the school district. Sam and Tynesha have met the physical education requirement of two semesters. For each of them, physical education has been a very different experience and their motivation to participate within the setting has varied. Sam referred to physical education as her favorite class (Sam, 3-06-02). Octavia participated in physical education, but did not go above and beyond the required amount (Octavia, 1-30-02). Sara participated in physical education at the start of this study, but her class schedule switched for the remainder of the year. For her, physical education was something that she did simply to earn credit. Sara wanted to avoid being what Griffin (1984) referred to as a female fatale in the gymnasium, one who acts as if physical education is a waste of time. Tynesha’s story illustrated the affect a teacher can have on a student, particularly within the walls of a gymnasium. In her first physical education class, Tynesha was
held accountable for her level of participation and the instructor introduced her to and taught her about various activities. In her second physical education class, however, she was not required to participate or dress out, nor was she instructed on any topics pertaining to physical education. Consequently, she slept through most classes and received an “A”, but enjoyed the class and respected the teacher considerably less than in her first physical education class. Lund (1990) described accountability as the consequence a teacher uses to increase the likelihood of a student completing a task. Tynesha’s second physical education teacher did not hold her students accountable, and thus, according to Tynesha, no one in her class participated in physical education (Tynesha, 3-04-02). Lund expanded on her description of accountability and stated that unless a teacher monitors or assigns some form of accountability, completing tasks becomes a choice for the students. Instead of holding students accountable for dressing, participating, and academic knowledge of the activities covered, Tynesha’s PE 2 instructor not only failed to impose the consequences that Lund (1990) suggested are necessary for students to complete tasks, but also set up no standards by which to judge her students’ performances. Even if Tynesha had wanted to participate in this class, there were no activities in which to participate in PE 2. Luke and Sinclair (1991) recommend that physical educators set high standards for all of their students. In addition, physical education teachers themselves should be held accountable for what they do, or fail to do, in the gymnasium.

Physical activity served a social function for three of the four co-researcher. For Tynesha, physical activity allowed her time to be a spectator at sporting events and to spend time with her family and friends. Sam viewed physical activity as a

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social time and found it was more fun to be active with others (Sam, 1-30-02) than alone. Octavia enjoyed physical activity because of the social role it played in her life, and she participated because her friends participated (Octavia, 2-13-02). But she also perceived physical activity as a potential hindrance to her social life. Octavia valued having time to spend with friends more than having time to devote to physical activity. She learned this from her very active friend, Swoops, who had limited time for friends, church and attending sporting events due to the demands of her athletic endeavors (Octavia, 2-13-02). For Octavia, this was a red flag, and although she was willing to become involved in certain physical activities for the social dimension they provided her, she was cognizant that too much involvement in physical activity inhibited other things she wanted to do.

In addition to the social role, Octavia’s case illustrated that physical activity serves as a function of fulfilling a prescribed gender role. Octavia learned of the existence of gender roles early in her sports career when she became a cheerleader at the age of nine, not because she chose cheerleading but rather because, being female, she was not permitted to play in the football league. In her heart, Octavia believed that both males and females should be permitted to participate in whatever physical activities they choose. It appears that this initial experience in gender roles at the age of nine has influenced Octavia and her beliefs about appropriate roles for males and females at the age of 15. Octavia is more forgiving of females who are not active than males who are not active. If a male is not physically active, she considers him “lazy”, but if a female does not participate in physical activity, they are simply being “feminine” (Octavia, 3-14-02). This attitude is one that is prevalent in male traditions.
of sport and physical activity. The fact that Octavia was unaware of her bias on this particular issue adds support to the idea that the co-researchers have helped advance the male dominated notions that oppress females in our society. It should be noted that although it is socially acceptable for females to have a lack of involvement in physical activity, inactive and even non-athletic males are held to the same unattainable standard of athletic males.

In addition, Octavia referred to her mother's support of her brother, even if he were involved in ballet because it would enhance his athletic abilities for football. However, Octavia did not benefit from this same unconditional support when she tried out for football as a child. AAHPERD (1995) noted, "...it [gender] is the socialization of people to gender appropriate behavior reinforced by interactions with family, friends, peers, the school system, the community, and the political and economical systems" (p. 3). Octavia's mother held gender appropriate roles, particularly for females. Sam discussed that physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, and in this discussion she alluded to the fact that her father believes in gender roles for boys and girls in sport. Sam noted that her father would not allow her brother to be in ballet. Yet he was supportive of her sister being involved in football. Tynesha also had a strong desire to utilize physical activity as a means to achieve her desired appearance, and thus meet the demands of prescribed gender roles and expectations. Tynesha used the term "hot momma" to describe her desired appearance (somebody in shape, wears nice clothes, is professional and looks cute) (Tynesha, 3-04-02). Tynesha is already looking ahead to the future possibility of joining a gym, not for the health benefits, but to assist her in achieving the "hot
momma” status she so desires. A feminist, however, would not look highly upon this standard that Tynesha wants to achieve. For it is this type of standard that often leads people to unhealthy behaviors in order to attain a standard of beauty of which the purpose is essentially to attract the attention and approval of males. It is not only a male definition of beauty, but a heterosexist one as well.

Conclusions

There are five major take home messages regarding the perceptions and experiences of these four African American adolescent females that can be learned from this study. These relate to family support, integrating concepts of health and physical education into school curricula, structured physical education programs that hold students accountable, physical education programs that offer both competitive and non-competitive activities and that do not solely exist based on the concept of team sports, and utilizing the church (and other communities) as a venue for engagement in physical activity.

Family Support

Family support was a theme that emerged throughout each of the four cases. For all of the participants, this is where they were first introduced to physical activity and the opportunities for physical activity. It seems that although adolescents are generally making decisions between hanging out with friends or spending time with families, all four co-researchers expressed enthusiasm for participating in physical activity with their families. Integrating family workout time and family education into school systems would be beneficial. This is supported by Sallis (1999) who has suggested that we should emphasize afternoon after-school activity, enjoyment of

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physical education, and family involvement in physical activity. In light of the
difficulty many parents, especially working single parents, may encounter in
attending afternoon after-school activities, perhaps organizing evening and weekend
sessions of family physical activity would suit the needs of, and therefore encourage
participation from, a greater number of families.

A program built upon the idea of family participation should focus on two
primary goals; educating families on various aspects of physical activity, and creating
a fun and safe environment so that people of all ages can enjoy participating in
physical activity. Octavia and Sam both referred to their mothers as being critical of
their performance at various physical activity events. Educating parents is a crucial
step in helping to ensure that the element of “fun” is maintained in sport and physical
activity. Programs should also educate parents on healthy nutrition habits, healthy
cooking, the importance of physical activity in general and how it assists in disease
prevention, gender stereotyping, physical activity and fitness, and designing and
assessing one’s physical fitness and activity levels. Finally, education programs
should combine these concepts with techniques for incorporating them into everyday
life. Various types of education programs should be available for the varying ages of
the participants. Programs for young children should focus on the basic tenants of
health and physical activity such as what it means if their heart is beating fast, and
teaching basic skills such as striking, running, kicking, etc. Middle school-aged
children could learn to utilize the concepts learned in the programs for younger
children in small game play. In addition, aspects of healthy eating and healthy ways
to maintain weight should be taught. The high school youth should be taught
components of healthy living and how to incorporate this into designing personal fitness programs that can be maintained throughout life. Certain aspects of health and fitness education for adolescents should be gender specific. For instance adolescent males and females could be taught classes on self-defense, pregnancy, and health risks associated with taking steroids. In addition, various competitive and non-competitive activities should be offered to all age groups within the program.

**Integrating Concepts of Health and Physical Education Courses into School Curricula:**

This theme emerged in each of the co-researcher’s cases. It is interesting to note that although each co-researcher thought that physical activity was an important part of a healthy lifestyle, it seems that more can be done within the school systems to promote this concept. None of the co-researchers specifically mentioned the school as a source of their beliefs about physical activity. This is alarming considering that it is the only place where the co-researchers were required to be physically active and to listen to information on health. The knowledge the co-researches had gained pertaining to physical activity and healthy lifestyles came primarily from their parents. This knowledge, however, was anything but specific. Octavia, who was required to lift weights as part of the training for her school’s softball program, had to learn proper lifting techniques and routines from a friend (Octavia, 03-14-02). She also mentioned that she avoids eating red meat, but had no idea why or if this was a healthy practice (Octavia, 3-14-02). Tynesha referred to people having “bad cells” around their hearts as a result of not exercising, but could not elaborate as to the specific physical names or details of any health problems associated with a lack of
physical activity and poor eating habits (Tynesha, 02-11-02). Perhaps instead of keeping health and physical education separate entities, the two should be infused so that students are learning concepts about healthy lifestyles from their health class and simultaneously put them into practice in physical education class. Tynesha mentioned that her first physical education class incorporated health concepts into the physical education environment and she found this beneficial.

*Structured Physical Education Programs that Hold Students Accountable For Learning*

Physical education must be a graded curriculum requirement and students must be held accountable. Lund (1990) suggested that without accountability, students have a choice as to whether or not they will complete assigned tasks. It appeared that only Sam gave her full effort in physical education because of her intrinsic love for activity. Octavia, Sara and Tynesha gave enough effort to receive a good grade. In Tynesha’s case, however, she found that when she was required to be physically active in order to receive a good grade, she truly enjoyed the experience. She also learned that when she was not held accountable and did not have to put forth effort in her class, she preferred to sleep rather than to exert herself. Teachers must be held accountable for requiring students to participate and learn.

Developing new models of physical education to better serve the needs of a variety of ethnicities and genders will not improve current levels of adolescent participation in physical education if physical educators don’t implement these models and hold students accountable for learning. I suggest that students and teachers have joint ownership of the physical education program in the gymnasium,
and students have choices as to the activities they participate in, and the level of
cOMPETITIVENESS they engage in with others in physical activities. This will help to
shift physical education programs from patriarchal methods of teaching physical
education and allow student choice yet still maintain a safe, predictable, and
supportive climate, while holding students and teachers accountable for learning in
the gymnasium.

*Physical Education Programs That Stray From Traditional Models*

Each of the four co-researchers participated in physical activities such as:
dance, drill team, and cheerleading. Success in these types of physical activities is not
derived solely from competition, speed, strength, or aggression; traits that are
typically associated with males and frequently assessed in school physical education
programs (Smeal, Carpenter, & Tait, 1994). Two co-researchers associated physical
education (and physical activity) as an arena where they lost their self-confidence.
Lirgg (1992) suggested that individuals who perceive they are good at a particular
skill choose to be active and persistent in that activity. However, individuals who
predict that they will perform poorly will either choose a less demanding task, refuse
to be involved in that activity, or become discouraged and quit. If physical education
curricula focused on less traditional activities such as walking, and dance, and even
allowed students to create new activities, students who are not motivated to
participate in competitive activities may enjoy their physical education experiences.

One factor in current models of physical education that appears to contribute
to apprehension on the part of females about their bodies and their physical
performances is that these models are implemented in primarily co-educational settings. Tynesha’s and Sara’s experiences with ridicule due to their participation in physical activity, as well as Ms. Tandy’s assertion that many of her female students dislike participating because of their fear of looking unskilled in front of boys, would be non issues if their physical education classes did not include boys. Title IX mandated that physical education be co-educational with the exception of contact sports, thus, our current programs are typically co-educational for most activities taught. The intent of Title IX was to increase access and opportunities for females, however, an inverse effect has occurred. Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate our physical education programs, who is and is not active in our present programs, and entertain the idea of re-designing our programs. One such suggestion was provided by Ms. Tandy, who mentioned that an all-girls environment may be beneficial for females. However, in developing all-girl physical education programs, we must be careful not to make the mistake of continuing to teach girls the male models of physical education or even an all-girl curriculum. If female adolescents are worried about performing badly, especially in front of boys, then continuing to judge their success based on skill proficiency, competitiveness, aggression and enthusiasm for winning, would defeat the purpose of educating them separately from their male counterparts. We must be mindful, however, that there are several cautions to reverting to single-gendered classes. First, there are multiple genders and identities among our youth. How students would choose to identify themselves would thus be an issue in determining the appropriate setting for their physical education. Second, males who are less athletic and perform inefficiently according to the male standards they may
encounter in an all-male setting would obviously not enjoy this experience. Thus, perhaps student choice of whether to participate in co-educational or single-sex classrooms, or even classes based on skill level may be more appropriate.

*Church as a Source of PA*

As suggested by the context of the study, the church was a source of their beliefs about physical activity. Reverend Thunder alluded to the fact that the church plays a central role in the lives of many African Americans. This being the case, we must find ways to collaborate with churches in an effort to integrate physical activity and knowledge about healthy lifestyles into the church programs. In addition, Sam spoke of offering family activities through the church that would provide opportunities for families to spend time with one another and, at the same time, be physically active. However, if we, as educators, are to venture into church and other community settings, it is imperative that we do so collaboratively, and in non-traditional, non-hierarchical manners.

*Tensions in This Study*

There were several times throughout this study that I found myself struggling with several tensions that existed between the findings, literature on physical activity, literature on feminism, Black feminist literature and my own personal feelings and thoughts. Due to the fact that these came up on more than one occasion, I feel it necessary to share examples of some of the competing tensions I faced throughout this research process.

For example the concept of “hot momma” as presented by Tynesha led to mixed feelings as a researcher. As a physical educator and one who encourages
physical activity, I support Tynesha’s desire to be active. As a feminist, however, I have strong concerns not about the fact that Tynesha wants to become physically active, but about the reasons she wants to do so. As an educator I would prefer that Tynesha’s desire to be physically active stem from a motivation to be healthy, rather than from a need to conform to a societal standard of beauty. A fine line exists between physical activity and good health, and taking physical activity to the extreme. As one beginning to study Black Feminist literature, I realize that there are issues that are particular to Black females that I need to become more familiar with in order to assist in the deconstruction of African American female involvement in sport. For example, hooks (1995) suggested that due to the patriarchy of White supremacy, personal characteristics of White women become standards of beauty for all women. This often leads to minority adolescent females being held to two standards of beauty: one dictated by their culture and one based on European American standards (Guthrie, Caldwell, & Hunter, 1997). Perhaps Tynesha was not only struggling to become a “hot momma” in her mind, but also to become one in her culture, and in the larger European American culture as well. The literature regarding Black females is of great relevance here, and I acknowledge I must continue to read more of this literature in the future.

A second example of a tension that I felt throughout the research was related to Octavia. In her childhood, Octavia, initially chose to participate in football, but was discouraged from doing so by adults. Personally, I encourage all youth to pursue their interests regarding physical activity despite the barriers presented by gender, race, and class norms. Other feminists, however, have expressed a valid viewpoint that
females should be discouraged from entering the sporting realm in general, especially in what has traditionally been exclusively male sports, such as football, because it leads to female adoption of male behavior and values in sport (Nilges, 2000). I struggled between supporting Octavia’s desire to participate in an activity she loves and refers to as her favorite sport, and some of the tenants of feminism as they relate to sport.

Additionally, for Sam physical activity provided her with the opportunity to be competitive and I felt tensions between my personal beliefs and the feminist literature. Personally, I feel that competition can lead to the development of characteristics such as dedication, determination, a strong work ethic, and value of success and failure. However, I also feel that competition can be taken too far. Feminists such as Smeal, Carpenter and Tait (1994) argue that characteristics such as competitiveness are typically male dominated and overemphasized in the content of physical education programs. While I support Sam for wanting to be competitive, I do not feel that we should solely base our physical education programs and success in them on characteristics such as speed, strength, aggression and competitiveness. However, I also do not feel that these characteristics should completely be removed from our gymnasiums. Again, I felt tensions and various emotions throughout the study with regard to personal beliefs and feminist positions.

Finally, Sara who was the least active of the co-researchers, presented many tensions within me. As a physical educator, I want to encourage all of my students to engage in beneficial amounts of physical activity, primarily for health reasons. However, my own personal beliefs lead me to support that not all individuals enjoy
physical activity and should not be pushed to do what they are uncomfortable participating in. Furthermore, critical cultural feminism was a useful lens to help interpret issues of class and their impact on Sara’s physical activity options. Sara described to me that she was not physically active and this was largely due to her family responsibilities. The story she painted was that if she did not have the responsibility of caring for her younger brother after school, she would like to pursue an after school sport. Sara also stressed that her mother would support her in all that she desired to do. Perhaps if her family were in a higher socioeconomic bracket, they could afford day care for her brother and she would have freedom after school to participate in activities that she desired. However, Sara described her family to me as middle class. Thus, I felt a personal tension within my research between portraying an accurate account of each co-researcher as I perceived them and an accurate account of each co-researcher as she saw herself. With Sara, for instance, I could not address the issue of class and its influences on her physical activity levels as fully as I wanted to because to do so could have offended her. I did not want to risk ruining the trust that had developed between us by questioning her perception of her family’s socioeconomic status as middle class.

The above are four examples, one for each co-researcher, of the various tensions I felt throughout the study. There was an intersection between my personal beliefs, my beliefs as a physical educator, my feminist beliefs, and existing literature on Black feminism. I felt it necessary to elaborate and share specific examples of how the cases and the information that arose within and between cases was neither clear cut nor simple in my mind, but rather blurred and complex.
Recommendations

As a result of this study the following three recommendations are provided for physical educators and those designing physical activity programs. These are what I view as key tenants to a successful physical activity program, particularly for African American adolescent females like those I studied for this project.

1. Create an open and safe environment for females (and males) to participate. The role of the physical educator/physical activity leader is crucial in ensuring a safe space for females, males, and trans-gendered students to participate in physical activity. During the observations of these students and from conversations with the four females, I have observed too many hurtful jokes in schools that have been tolerated by the faculty. Allowing such behavior sends the message that it is acceptable to direct negative comments at peers. For example, Sara referred to the fact that she views physical activity as an arena in which people make fun of one another. Sara stated that the only things she learned through her physical education class about healthy lifestyles were “fat jokes”. Sara indicated that on several occasions her physical educator or other teachers overheard these remarks but they were ignored. Octavia specified that it was her softball coach, a health educator in her school, who called her fat. This individual has assisted in replicating negative connotations associated with being overweight and advanced the male dominated notion of physical beauty. We cannot expect students to curb their derogatory language or reconsider their notions about social norms when we as educators fail to do so ourselves. This instructor not only demonstrated a lack of professionalism, but
also a lack of sensitivity and humanism as well. It is crucial that we as educators eradicate this inappropriate and unacceptable behavior within the walls of the school buildings and outside of school as well. In today's world there is much negativism and hatred, and we must speak up and indicate to students that this is neither funny nor acceptable. Instead of continuing to walk down the hallways and pretend we do not hear the hurtful comments directed at someone because of their weight, skill level, socioeconomic status, or academic success or failure, we must step up and challenge these comments in order to first and foremost create safe spaces for all students.

2. Offer both competitive and noncompetitive physical activities in school and out of school. The present curriculum that exists focuses to a large extent on team sports and is evaluated on and based on male characteristics such as speed, strength, and aggression (Nilges, 2000). It is time that we offer alternative activities in and out of the gymnasium that would be attractive for all students, not simply competitive, highly-skilled individuals. Williamson (1993) suggested that we incorporate outdoor adventure into our curriculum and other cooperative activities. It is time that physical educators stray from their comfortable knowledge of team sports and incorporate cooperative activities into their classrooms. In addition, it is time for physical educators to stray out of their gymnasium and help offer appropriate physical activity programs within communities as well.

3. Truly Commit Not Only to the Profession of Physical Education, but to the Implementation of This Education. It is crucial that we must take our careers as physical educators very seriously and realize the effect we can have on students. It is
typical for physical educators to feel isolated in their schools. It is our responsibility to reach out to the families of our students and to the communities in which our schools reside. We must find ways to integrate appropriate role models (of various genders, ethnicities and sexualities) who regularly engage in physical activity into our physical education programs so that our students have individuals to look up to. It is also our role as physical educators to learn about the various ethnicities and cultures of the students we teach. We can integrate alternative physical activities from other countries into our physical education programs. In addition, physical education lends itself to an environment to speak about various issues that are relevant in our society such as homophobia, putting down others based on skill level, gender, or ethnicity, and views of acceptable beauty within our society. Curricula in the United States that encourage students to question taken-for-granted assumptions about sport and physical education in today's society have received little attention in middle school and high school physical education programs (Kinchin & O'Sullivan, 1999; O'Sullivan, Kinchin, Kellum, Dunaway, & Dixon, 1996). However, one such example of an overlooked curriculum in the United States is The Cultural Studies (CS) approach (Kinchin & O'Sullivan, 1999). This is an approach to help students appreciate and critique the role of physical activity and sport in their school, their community, and their own lives. It attempts to make connections that are meaningful between physical education in school and sport and physical activity, or the lack of it, in student's lives. It is imperative that more physical educators learn about curricula such as The Cultural Studies Approach and integrate it into their gymnasiums and schools and integrate them into physical education programs in America.


**Recommendations for Future Research**

I will now provide specific recommendations for future research that I deem relevant after the completion of this study.

1. In order to continue to assess student participation, student enjoyment and the positive and negative effects of Title IX, specifically in the gymnasium, qualitative and quantitative studies of all female and all male physical education programs are necessary. All male and all female schools could be studied to assist with this. The strengths, weaknesses of physical education programs, students’ feelings of success and failure, and knowledge of healthy lifestyles of students in single gendered classrooms versus co-educational classrooms should be assessed.

2. It is necessary to not only discuss what a feminist pedagogy would look like in a gymnasium, but it is imperative that we implement a feminist pedagogy in the gymnasium and study the effects it has on all students.

3. This study was limited to four African American adolescent females who all attended the same church. Future studies should start from the school setting or another community institution and look at research questions similar to those investigated in this study.

4. Each of the four co-researchers was involved in dance from a young age. Future studies that focus on the aspects of dance and other non-competitive physical activities should be studied so that we can integrate these values and
non-competitive physical activities into during school, lunchtime and after school programs.

5. Methodologically, this study was limited to interviews, writing activities, observations and document analysis. Future studies should continue to utilize co-researchers not only the study itself, but in the design of research questions, and in the specific methodology utilized. This would enhance the notion of studies being mutually beneficial.

Epilogue

I feel that it is most appropriate to end this study with an epilogue of how this study has affected and influenced me as a physical educator training future teacher educators, and to share with the reader what the co-researchers are doing months after the study.

I'd like to begin by sharing a snippet about each co-researcher and what they are up to four months after the study. Octavia is presently taking physical education as a summer school course so that she can complete her two semester high school requirement for physical education. She chose to take physical education over the summer so that she could have room for other classes during the school year. Octavia describes her summer school physical education class to me as being very strenuous. Octavia will be a sophomore next year and has agreed to volunteer her time and assist with coaching the drill team at her school. She has recently stopped attending the dance program at Friend Church due to the frustration she was feeling with the structure of the program and she is pursuing dance informally with a small group of close friends. Sam is presently spending her summer working at the retirement home.
and has just completed a softball clinic to help prepare her for next season. She is excited about playing softball in the spring, but also intends to participate on the tennis team in the autumn. Tynesha has graduated high school and has chosen a college to attend in the fall. She is excited about the up-coming year and will soon be leaving for freshman orientation at the college. Sara is spending part of her summer working at a church camp at Friend Church, teaching young children about the Bible. She enjoys this but noted that it is quite exhausting and frustrating at times. All four girls recently shared with me that they would be more than happy to assist in future research. To me, this was rewarding and inspiring to hear, and I do hope to have the opportunity to work with them in the future presenting the results of this work as a team.

I would now like to share what I feel are some of the major points I have taken away with me as a teacher educator. I feel that it is critical that we as educators truly get to know our students. The example that is most fresh in my mind from this study is from Sara’s story. Sara’s teacher described her as fitting in socially at school. What is alarming to me is that it is very clear that once I had the opportunity to sit down to talk with and get to know Sara, I quickly learned that she often puts on a front and acts as though hurtful comments do not injure her, but indeed, they do. In each of my interviews with her she referenced specific hurtful comments that were directed at her. This appears to be something many of us, as educators, and as humans, can address. It is imperative that we truly get to know our students, learn what they like, dislike, what motivates them, and what scars them emotionally.
I also believe that it is critical that as physical educators we get to know the community in which we are teaching. An example of a way to achieve this is to have student teachers complete a community mapping exercise within the community they are teaching. This would allow them not only to get to know the community their students live but would also assist in helping teachers to recognize their students’ assets rather than solely their deficits.

I also realize that there is a body of knowledge out there that I still have to tackle. I also acknowledge though, that as much as I would have liked to have read every article and every book on physical activity, adolescents, feminism, literature on African Americans, and literature on Black feminism this was not possible in the time frame of this study. However, I feel that if this is a topic I continue to study, I must immerse myself in the literature and continue on the journey I began, nourishing my mind with new knowledge along the way. This will assist in further deconstruction of these findings, and it is my ultimate goal that this will help me to craft more deliberate and richer experiences for African American females so they may participate in physical activity more regularly and consequently reduce the number of risk factors relating to their health later on in life.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my sincere gratitude to Octavia, Sam, Tynesha and Sara for assisting me with this study. I do indeed hope our paths cross again. Thank you for enriching my life.
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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM
Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Kim Bush. Reverend Thunder and others at the church have provided Dr. Mary O'Sullivan (a faculty member at The Ohio State University in the College of Education and my doctoral advisor) and myself with the opportunity to design a physical activity program that will be offered through the church. Research indicates that although youth are the most active segment in society, they are on a whole, very inactive. I will be working with Reverend Thunder to promote the importance of being physically active over the lifetime. Reverend Thunder supports this and is very enthusiastic about it.

The program is voluntary and will meet every week prior to or at the conclusion of Bible Study for the next several months. As part of this project, we would like to gather information about the role of physical education, physical activity and sport in the lives of adolescent African American females. The program will consist of your daughter talking to me about her experiences in sport, physical activity and physical education. In addition, with your permission, I would like the opportunity to shadow your daughter at school for a day or two, and on a weekend day. I am also hoping to speak to you and your daughter's coaches and/or physical activity instructors at some point. I am asking for your permission to talk with your daughter and audiotape my discussions I have with her. I will also be interacting with your daughter through formal and informal activities offered through the church. Your daughter will have the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion. If you have any concerns or questions, or do not want your daughter to work with me, please contact Reverend Thunder.

By signing the attached form, you will give consent for me to interact with your daughter through formal and informal observations and conversations over the next eight months. Should you have any questions about this research project feel free to contact Dr. Mary O'Sullivan (688-4701) or Ms. Kim Bush (784-0330).

I look forward to working with your daughter throughout the upcoming months. Thank you for your support and help!

Dr. Mary O'Sullivan, Ph.D
Faculty Advisor
Ms. Kimberly A. Bush
Graduate Student
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled:
Promoting Physical Activity Among Urban African American Young Women

The researchers have explained the purpose of the study and the expectations of me as a participant in the study. A description of the study’s benefits has been explained in detail.

If I have any questions or need additional information regarding the study, I am to ask and I will immediately be given the necessary information. I understand that I may withdraw or discontinue my participation in the study at any given time. I understand that no prejudice will be shown or exhibited toward me or others for doing so.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ________________
Signed: ____________________________________________
      (Participant)

Date: ________________
Signed: ____________________________________________
      (Parent or Guardian)

Date: ________________
Signed: ____________________________________________
      (Principal/Primary Investigator)

Date: ________________
Signed: ____________________________________________
      (Investigator)

HS-027 (Rev. 3/87)-To be used in connection with social and behavioral research.
APPENDIX B

TIME OF YOUR LIFE ACTIVITY
Describe a typical day hour by hour. Please be as specific as possible, ie. Include what you eat for meals, who you eat with, who you are in class with, what your classes are, what you do after school and what you do on weekends, and with whom.
1) Identify the areas where they spend time, e.g. home
2) List the people in each of the areas with first name
3) Identify
   a. Male or female
   b. Approx age
   c. Ethnicity
4) By each of the individuals list:
   a. 1=Supportive of exercise – I would be more likely to be active if I were around this person
   b. 2=Neutral, neither supportive or not supportive – This person would not influence my physical activity levels
   c. 3=Not supportive of exercise – I would less likely to be active if I were around this person
APPENDIX D

FIVE WORDS MY FRIENDS WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE ME ARE:
Five Words My Friends Would Use To Describe Me Are:
Script For Interview 3

- Have you had either of these teachers before?
- When I asked to come out to your school, why did you suggest that I observe ____ class?
- Of the classes you are taking right now, and of those that you took in the past, which of these do you see linkage between what you do in class and what you do or will do out in the “real world”?
- Is this class typical or atypical of the other classes that you take?

I’d like to talk to you about your mother for a few minutes:
- Did your mother go to college? If so, do you know where she went?
- Describe a typical day for your mother. What are the daily expectations that are placed on your mother?
- Do you want your life to be like your mother’s life? If so, why, if not why not, what would you want different?
- What does your mother expect from you (and your siblings)? Is this different than what she expects from your brother?
- Talk to me about your mother’s support for you in all that you do.

Time Questions:
How much time do you spend on homework each night?
How many hours are spent at school?
How many hours do you work a week?
How much time do you spend at church each week (hours)?
How much time do you spend on the phone each week?
How much free time do you have each week to do what you want?
How many hours a week do you think you spend being physically active?

How would you prioritize things in your life?

Are there physical activities that you would like to do but cannot? If so, why can you not do them?

- Are you familiar with the national guidelines for Physical Activity?
- Are you familiar with the Mayor’s idea of Columbus’ notion of “Commit to be Fit”?
  If so, tell me about this. If you were going to “Commit to be Fit”, what would you do? Who would you do it with? Do you think that there would be costs associated with this, and if so, how would you meet them?
-What have you learned in school about healthy lifestyles? What have you learned at home about healthy lifestyles? What have you learned at church about healthy lifestyles? What have you learned from your friends about healthy lifestyles? What have you learned from the media (TV, Radio and magazines) about healthy lifestyles?

-How often do you think you should exercise?
-How many hours of sleep a night do you think is healthy to get?
-What makes up a healthy diet?
-What do you do to keep your spirit happy?

-Which of these things do you think you apply to your lifestyle? Which do you not apply? Why/why not? What would make it easier to apply some of these to your life?

-Tell me about the people you know who run, jog, go to the gym and are committed to being physically active most days of the week?

-Do you consider yourself healthy? Why/Why not?

-When you participate in physical activities, which ones do you consider yourself to be good at? Which ones do you not consider yourself to be good at? Which ones do you enjoy? Which do you think you will participate in the future?

-What is your view of structure of dance? Are you getting the benefits of structured PA? What does it feel like when you are dancing?
-Cost of dance?

-If there were no TV’s, computers, radio or phone in your home, what do you think you would spend your time doing?

-Would you still watch lunch time basketball (or other physical activities) if your friends didn’t go? Do you enjoy watching basketball more or enjoy talking with your friends at basketball that you enjoy more?

-How would the boys react if the girls wanted to play basketball during lunch?

-Is there a place in school that would encourage girls to participate in physical activity? For example, a “girls only” time? Do you think this would be a good idea? Why or why not? What circumstances may encourage girls to be more active? For example is there a better time during the day or a certain place? If girls could work out in privacy away from boys, do you think more girls would be physically active?
If it were a different sport that was open to the students, (anything but basketball) do you think that the boys would still play?

When I was growing up, certain sports were considered "boys" sports and certain sports were considered "girls" sports. Is this the same today? What are some examples?

The same was true for ethnicity. Certain sports were considered to be for African Americans and certain sports were for Caucasians, is this the same? Examples?

**Importance of beauty:**
- Talk to me about the statement "I'm gonna be a hot mama". What is a "hot mama"? How would I know one if I saw one? What would "a hot mama look like"? Who can be a "hot mama"? What would the equivalent be for a Caucasian girl?

- If you were to join a gym in the future, do you know what the costs are associated with it?

- Why did you rank your favorite activities as you did?

- Are there stereotypes associated with lifting weights?

- Is there a certain pace or distance that has to be walked to be considered exercise?

**Term "ghetto".** What does this mean? How would I know if something were ghetto? Is this like the term "white trash"?

Let's pretend that there was a new African American student at your high school and you and she became friends. If she asked you what she needed to do to "fit in" at your school, what would you tell her? For example, what kinds of things are acceptable and encouraged for girls in your school?

A friend of mine did a study at a Columbus High School and he found that during the spring and there were two sports being played. Baseball and Track. He noticed that all of the boys playing baseball were white and all of the boys on the track were black. Does this surprise you? Can you think of other sports that are like that? How can we apply this to girls? Are there sports that it would be considered too uncool for a girl to play? Are there some that are considered to be cool for girls to play that you do not do now?

Are you familiar with Tiger Woods? Do you think that you would want to play golf someday? Why do you think that there are so few African American's in the sport of golf?
Recently the Arnold Swarzeneager Classic was here. Are you familiar with what this is? I am going to show you some pictures, and I want you to talk to me about them and tell me if you would like to look like these or not, and why, also if you see any "hot mama's" tell me. Just talk to me about the pictures you see.
APPENDIX F

FIVE WORDS TO DESCRIBE ME ARE
Five Words To Describe Me Are:

1
2
3
4
5
Parent Interview Script

If you were to choose five words to describe your daughter to me, what would they be?

We all have many experiences in physical education classes, some good and some bad, could you describe what physical education class was like for you when you were an adolescent?

Could you describe what (if any) involvement you had in physical activity (outside of school) when you were growing up?

Who encouraged you or influenced you to be physically active as a youth? Alternatively, what turned you away from Physical Activity?

Could you describe to me what (if any) involvement in physical activity you presently have? How did you get involved in this? What do you see as the benefits of this involvement?

Are you presently (or have you ever been) physically active with your daughter? If so, could you describe some of these experiences to me (what do you do, when do you do it, what about it do you enjoy?)

Why would physical activity be something to support with your daughter?

What access and opportunities do you think are available for your daughter to participate in physical activities? What do you think about this? (are there enough opportunities? How could we encourage more?) Are there any physical activities you would like to see your daughter do that she does not? Are there any physical activities that you would like her not to participate in? Why?
What do you see as the barriers or problems associated with helping your daughter participate in the various physical activities she is involved in (or would like to be involved with). What are some of the things you have been able to overcome?

Do you see your daughter as being resistant to physical activity or is she supportive of it? How about kids in general?
APPENDIX H

REVEREND THUNDER INTERVIEW
Reverend Thunder Interview Script

How do you see the role of church in the lives of the AA community as opposed to other communities, why does it seem so much more significant?

What kind of pressure does the church place on its members to be really involved in church (which may take away from time to be involved in other activities)?

Role the church plays, and why historically why it’s less compartmentalized than other churches?

Churches view for appropriate roles for females?

Churches view for appropriate roles of women in sports?

Kinds of pressures...is the church more accepting for males missing church for sporting events, more so than females? Why less important for females to play sport than attend church?

Athletics is a social thing....does she agree with some of the things I have found. How I see (from what I gathered) the church is a huge extended family, not just distant, and does she agree with this?
APPENDIX I

TEACHER INTERVIEWS
Physical Education Teacher Script

What is your class focusing on? (ie. Skills, fitness, getting along, activity?)

How receptive is __________ to participating in your class? How does this compare to the other African American females in your class?

Could you talk to me about ___________. Describe her to me, in particular with regard to her skill level in physical activities and her knowledge of a healthy lifestyle.

What do you feel is possible to do with the females in the classes you teach? Is this different between ethnicities?

What is the biggest barrier to what you are trying to accomplish in your class?

What do you think schools, physical educators and recreation centers could do to better promote physical activity among African American Adolescent females, and increase involvement?

Teacher Script

How would you describe __________ to me?

Could you describe her participation and interests in your class?

How does she interact socially?

Could you describe to me how she performs in your class compared to her peers?