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Schooling the Female Body:

Discourses of the Body and Physical Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

There is not a lot of empirical research to confirm a strong relationship between discourses of the body in physical education and females' perceptions of their bodies. Hence, the purpose of this study was to provide space for participants to share their experiences of physical education.

I chose semi-structured interviewing to generate conversations between myself and four undergraduate female students from the Faculty of General Studies, at a university in western Canada. The volunteers for the study were invited to participate in two audio-taped interviews, during which they discussed and reflected on their experiences and perceptions of junior and senior high school physical education.

The participants' conversations were then analyzed using discourse analysis. As a result of the analysis two discourses were identified that helped to shape the participants' views of their experiences and also their views of themselves in relation to physical education: the formalization of physical education as a discipline, and the discourse of performance in physical education. The participants' conversations also showed that three discourses influenced their perceptions of their bodies. The three discourses were the discourse of the performing body type, the discourse of the body as object, and the discourse of the desirable body.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Physical education is a key site for the acquisition of . . . the techniques of the body in ways which demand conformity to dominant social and cultural values and norms (Kirk, D. 1993, The Body, Schooling and Culture, p. 29).

### **Personal History of Teaching Adolescent Females in Physical Education**

As a teacher of physical education in Scotland, I observed adolescent females who were very self-conscious of their bodies and their performances in physical education classes. I observed females pulling at their T-shirts to ensure the silhouettes of their hips and thighs were hidden from unwelcome scrutiny. Others tried to hide any area of their bodies that they learned was problematic. Many of those girls would only participate in a half-hearted fashion in the skill practices or games. There were adolescent females who would continually forget their physical education kit. Was it due to poor organization on the students' parts? Probably not. Some teachers would classify the pupils' reluctance to participate as just being typical for girls. Why such apathy towards physical education? Why such self-consciousness?

A number of reasons for females' reluctance to participate in physical education have been articulated in the literature: an interest in maintaining a sophisticated feminine image or perhaps a perception of themselves as unskilled and deserving of ridicule from their peers (Hargreaves, 1986; Hendry, 1978; Kirk, 1993; Scraton, 1987). As a teacher of physical education I did not have the time to explore the reasons behind the students' reluctance to participate fully or at all in their physical education lessons. My master's research has provided me with the opportunity to conduct such an inquiry.

The purpose of this inquiry is to explore adolescent females' experiences in physical education. I have drawn upon the work of Michel Foucault to guide my exploration. Below I outline the major theoretical concepts which frame my study.

### **Discourse**

Cherryholmes (1988) states that "discourse refers to what is said and written and passes for more or less orderly thought and exchange of ideas" (p. 2). Educational discourse can be located on a continuum from what is said in a classroom by a teacher or a pupil, in teacher training courses, and in research reports presented at conferences, to what is written in school text books, in assessment procedures to be used in curriculum, and in articles written in professional journals. Weedon (1997) points out that

Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the "nature" of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside of their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourses constitute the minds and bodies of individuals is always a part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases. (p. 105)

Some discourses will be very strong and present themselves as the natural order of things. These are referred to as dominant discourses. Some people live their lives by the rules of the dominant discourses and find themselves marginalised because of them. People may momentarily question why some things are the way they are, but feel powerless to make changes. Therefore they toe the social line and conform to the



dominant discourses. An example of a dominant social convention is that men are not to show their emotional side too often, whereas women are expected to show the emotional side of their character.

Weedon (1997) states that the most influential discourses in society have solid institutional bases: the family, law, medicine and schools. Institutions like schools offer sites where students can be exposed to educational discourses in the shape of the formal and informal curriculum. The formal curriculum sets down the aims and objectives of what is to be covered in the educational program. As such the curriculum creates a “disciplinary space” whereby students are shaped in particular ways. Assessment procedures ensure that certain discourses predominate. In physical education for example, performance is labeled as competent or incompetent. The informal curriculum refers to students’ lived experience of the formal curriculum. As such, students make sense of the planned curriculum through their personal and institutional histories. Although schools may set down particular notions of competence, students may redefine competence according to their own needs.

### **Power - Knowledge**

Foucault (1980) asserts that power and knowledge are interrelated. He believes power cannot exert any influence without the presence of knowledge/truth and that knowledge/truth is impotent without power. As Foucault suggests,

There are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established,

consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.

(1980, p. 93)

Foucault (1977) points out that the labeling of competent performances receives its power of influence through the rewards that are given to the people who achieve the category of competent performance. Teachers and students reinforce the notion/definition of competent performance through verbal and non-verbal praise that everyone can see and hear. The labeling of incompetent performance receives its power of influence through the lack of rewards and the absence of praise from teachers and student peers. Therefore everyone within the “disciplinary space” is informed as to what is the desirable performance. The power of this knowledge gives students a visual model of how to measure and judge performances and gives them an informal ranking within the class.

The power and knowledge of the discourse of competent and incompetent performances also helps individuals to practice self-examination (Foucault, 1977). Pupils learn that there is a particular standard for them to attain. If they attain the standard of performance that receives some form of reward, their confidence in themselves will improve; consequently they will happily perform in the public arena. On the other hand, if the pupils perceive that they cannot attain the standard that has been set in the class for

competent performance they may resort to some form of resistance that will exclude themselves from public examination by the institution and their peers (Foucault, 1977).

### **Resistance**

Weedon (1997) suggests that “Discourses do not exist in simple ‘bipolar’ relations of power and powerlessness” (p. 107). Pupils whose performances do not receive public recognition find ways to resist the dominant discourse. For instance, the nature and purpose of badminton is to play a variety of shots that will move the opponent about the court. This is done to tire the opponent until he or she plays a weak shot, which allows one to play the winning shot. Some pupils do not want to play badminton in the manner described. They will happily hit the shuttle back and forth to each other over the net. The nature and purpose of their badminton game is to keep the shuttle in play for as long as they can. They do not vary the length or direction of their shots, resulting in both players standing relatively still on either side of the net.

As a physical education teacher, I tried to encourage my pupils to incorporate some of the skills that were practiced at the start of a lesson, which reflected the intent of the game. The response I sometimes received from the pupils was, “No, we are trying to see how long we can keep this going.” The two players had re-negotiated the nature and purpose of the game to fit with what they wanted to achieve. The two pupils had created a space for themselves to silently resist the dominant discourse of the game’s official nature and purpose, which was to score points against the opponent. Resistance was possible because players did not want the game to have a competitive element, forcing one

player to win and the other player to lose. The competitive element was the combined effort of the two players to keep “their” game in motion.

As Foucault (1981) says,

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions, but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance. (p. 101)

Therefore, the strength of the dominant discourse is to generate the knowledge that is used to examine people’s public performances. However, the strength of the dominant discourse is also its weakness because people who feel that they cannot achieve the standards that are set down by the dominant discourse will find ways of diffusing the power of public examination. The story of the two badminton players re-negotiating the nature and purpose of “their” badminton game by keeping the shuttle in play for as long as they could, is an example of silent resistance to the dominant discourse. The space the players created also diffused the power of public examination, as they had re-negotiated the terms of competent performance. In other words the students regained a sense of control and satisfaction within the “disciplinary space” of their badminton game.

### **The Body**

Turner (1984) suggests that there are four interrelated themes in which the body is the main focus. He suggests that the first two themes, “reproduction” and “regulation” are related to the social body, which refers to populations. The second two themes are

“restraint” and “representation,” which refers to individual bodies. The theme of “reproduction” looks at population over a period of time with reference to the influence of patriarchy, and the influence of the medical profession on sexuality, childbirth and child rearing. The second theme looks at the “regulation of bodies in space” (Kirk, 1993, p. 55), which requires attention to a range of techniques of surveillance. It also looks at the institutionalized forms of bodily practices that school the body: the institution of schools regulate people’s movements within time and space. Turner (1984) recommends that the third regime, “restraint,” looks at how the body can be controlled by medical matters, including regimes of diet and exercise. The fourth theme, “representation,” looks at how the outer body can be influenced by the media industry, fitness, fashion and cosmetic-surgery. Therefore there are several discourses that can impact on the body.

The question can be asked: What has this to do with physical education? Physical education is a subject in the school curriculum where the body is highly visible and is open to regulation by the official and unofficial curriculum that operates within the school and the physical education department. Throughout the history of physical education, different discourses of the body have prevailed. I intend to examine how some of the dominant discourses of the body have evolved and maintained their positions with reference to adolescent females in physical education.

### **Dominant Discourses of the Body**

In this section I will briefly examine three discourses of the body that have emerged from my literature review: these are the gendered body, the body as machine, and

commodification of the body. In the section dealing with the gendered body I will briefly examine how physical activities historically were used to help in the construction of what was considered suitable for females' well being and preparation for their future role of motherhood. Also I will describe how physical activities were considered appropriate in disciplining males in their preparation for leadership and working together for a common goal. I will also describe how historically scientific knowledge became the dominant discourse in physical education.

With reference to the body as machine, I will briefly examine how scientific knowledge was incorporated into the curriculum at the university and school levels. I will examine how scientific knowledge may have promoted a mechanical view of the body if other knowledge of the body did not receive equal weighting in the university curriculum.

In the discussion of commodification of the body I will briefly look at the various industries that construct the body to portray and sell a sophisticated desirable image to the public. I will examine briefly how the knowledge generated from the media industry has the potential to be unofficially integrated through the discipline of physical education.

### **The Gendered Body**

Competitive team games in the mid 1800's played an important role in the education of the sons of wealthy and influential Canadian citizens. Headmasters of private schools believed that competitive team games promoted loyalty to the team, discipline, perseverance, fairness, courage, leadership, virility, individualism and the projection of manliness in their boys. These were the qualities which were considered necessary for

elite upper-class youth to learn and display in order to distinguish themselves from the lower class. In the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant clergymen tried to encourage the working class male youth in Canada's rapidly growing cities to participate in sport. The clergymen felt that the character building potential of sport would allow them to have some influence over the working class male youth. Clergymen, educators and leaders of the working-class organizations believed that a sense of community could be created and reinforced through sports participation (Lenskyj, 1989).

In 1890 physical education was officially established in the curriculum of Ontario schools. Educators, social reformers and doctors of that period were extremely concerned about the effects of rapid social change on school-aged children. They perceived mothers to be abandoning their duties in the home and consequently, in their view, these women's daughters were not being adequately educated in feminine behavior models (Lenskyj, 1989). Thus

The formalization of physical instruction, and the parallel developments in domestic science instruction at the turn of the century, were two official responses to the perceived problem, signifying the public takeover of aspects of gender-role socialization formerly entrusted to the private family, and the entrenchment of a sex-differentiated curriculum. (Lenskyj, 1989, p. 187)

At the turn of the century, school inspectors' reports consistently praised the value of physical education in promoting manliness in boys. The value of physical education for girls was to promote general and reproductive health (Hargreaves, 1985; Kirk, 1992; Lenskyj, 1989;). Doctors and educators consistently emphasized that girls' physical

education should contain only elements which would systematically exercise the female body for its main role in society, which was womanhood and motherhood. The activities in the curriculum were not to cause undue stress on the female body, or promote masculine qualities such as leadership, competitiveness, aggression and bodily contact with opponents (Hargreaves, 1985; Kirk, 1992; Lenskyj, 1986 & 1989). The medical profession insisted that females should not be encouraged to do any form of jumping as this could lead to “uterus displacement” and render the females infertile (Hargreaves, 1985; Kirk, 1992; Lenskyj, 1986 & 1989). At the turn of the century the activities in which the females of the Canadian privileged classes participated were tennis, croquet, fencing, golf, basketball, and field and ice hockey. Basketball and ice hockey were modified to incorporate a non-contact rule, which was in keeping with the perception of feminine deportment. The clothing which the females of the privileged classes wore also effectively maintained “lady like” deportment; for example “ voluminous and constrictive clothing: corsets, stockings, long skirts, tight bodices and belts” (Lenskyj, 1989, p. 191).

In 1911 Canadian physical education programs for the ordinary school aged children were largely made up of Swedish gymnastics, which involved exercises that systematically exercised segments of the body (Lenskyj, 1989). By the 1920’s many educators considered the militaristic value of Swedish gymnastics inappropriate for the education of children in the post-war period. The Swedish program was replaced with games and Danish gymnastics. The inclusion of Danish gymnastics in the physical education program was due to the North American tour of Danish gymnasts. Lenskyj (1989) writes that the changes to girls’ physical education in the 1920’s did not reflect any



rational planning to fulfill any particular aims and objectives. Teachers, doctors, philosophers and the Pope expressed disdain at females' participation in competitive sports (Lenskyj, 1989).

By 1928 Canada followed the American example and discontinued inter-school competition for women. However, there were alternative avenues outside the school system for females to compete in physical activities: at local clubs, community leagues and the Young Women's Christian Associations (Lenskyj, 1989). The apparent reasoning for discontinuing female inter-school competition was that doctors and educators perceived adolescent females to be emotionally unstable and unable to cope with the traveling to the games and with cheering audiences while they participated. Competition was also considered to be a serious threat to the physical and mental well-being of females when they were menstruating. The medical profession felt that females were at great risk of "uterus displacement" if they participated in vigorous exercise and performed any jumping actions. It would be reasonable to suggest that the medical profession exercised considerable power over what was considered appropriate for the well-being of the female body. Historically, it would also appear that the physical education profession helped to maintain the medical discourse on what was appropriate for the female body and its projection of femininity. This was achieved through the absence of physical activities that would have encouraged strenuous movements of the body.

After the second world war there was an influx of male physical education teachers who came mostly from the working class. The male physical education teachers embraced the public schools' games ethic as a means of enhancing their social status with reference

to their mainly middle class female colleagues and other subject teachers in the state schools (Kirk, 1992). The female physical education teachers, who were mostly from the bourgeoisie class, did not fully embrace the competitive games curriculum. They preferred the non-competitive games and the child-centered approach.

By the 1950's and early 1960's the male teachers' version of physical education was on the ascent and the female teachers' version was on the decline. This was due to the males' push for status through the application of the new scientific knowledge of the mechanical functions of the body (Kirk, 1992). Scientific knowledge in exercise physiology, which basically investigates how the cardiovascular and respiratory systems can be trained to operate at their optimum efficiency when a person is performing various physical tasks, would help the pupils to understand how to improve their physical fitness.

The female teachers believed that educational gymnastics prepared the body to transfer learning to other skills; for example time, weight, space and flow concepts could transfer over to dance movements. In contrast, the dominant science of behavioral psychology suggested that learning had to be specific to the skill. If a player was to learn to perform a right hand lay-up shot in basketball, that player would practice all the skills that lead up to performing the lay-up shot (Kirk, 1992). Thus, the female position in physical education was further undermined due to the arrival of the scientific understanding of human movement. Consequently the female vision of physical education lost its influence on the curriculum, and the status of the newly arrived male physical education teachers became enhanced through their enthusiasm for competitive games and sports. Also, the competitive games and sports supplied the medium for the application of

the new scientific knowledge that was quickly being incorporated into specialist courses, reflecting a functional and instrumental understanding of the body. The competitive team games, sport and the scientific discourse of how to school the body became the dominant focus in physical education from the 1960's onwards (Kirk, 1992; Scraton, 1987).

### **The Body as Machine**

The understanding of the body through the scientific discourse has helped to promote the academic standing of physical education, at university level. The scientific understanding of the body has been determined by rigorous scientific investigation. An illustration of this is when the body is linked up to many machines that monitor how it performs under various conditions the results inform coaches about the best training techniques for their athletes.

McKay, Gore and Kirk (1990) have observed that throughout Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia the "faculties of physical education offer many more subjects in the biological sciences than in the humanities and social sciences. Moreover, subjects in the biological sciences are usually compulsory, whereas those in the humanities and social sciences are often elective" (p. 58). Consequently student teachers of physical education are exposed to a regular diet of information on how to deconstruct the body and examine the parts. It is also important to be aware that the deconstruction of the body takes place, most of the time, in the science laboratory environment. Hence, student teachers develop and extend their understanding of how to improve the physical fitness and training methods of an athlete's body within a framework that emphasizes an effective and efficient

body. As Bain (1990) suggests, “fitness provides an outcome that is easily defined and measured, it often provides the central justification for physical education programs in a technological society” (p. 29).

Dewar (1990), Hargreaves (1986), and Kirk (1993) have pointed out that the students view biological/scientific knowledge as unproblematic. This could be a reflection of the fact that the scientific knowledge is compulsory in their courses and the knowledge generated from the humanities and social sciences “. . . constitute anywhere from zero to fewer than half of the compulsory and optional subjects in university curricula” in Canada (McKay, Gore & Kirk 1990, p. 58). The biological/scientific perspective portrays the body as a machine that must be appropriately maintained, conditioned and tuned to ensure its optimal performance and physical attractiveness. Therefore the student teachers of physical education could develop a narrow viewpoint that the body is an object to be schooled using the compulsory scientific knowledge they acquired while at university.

The scientific discourses of the body do not even appear to challenge the 19<sup>th</sup> century viewpoint of the male and female body. The male body is viewed to be larger and stronger than the female body. It is more predisposed to display the characteristics of aggressiveness and competitiveness that are necessary to be successful in most sports (Dewar, 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Kirk, 1992). The female body is more inclined to be perceived as passive and non-competitive.

The scientific knowledge that student teachers of physical education are exposed to while at university may not help them to effectively question socially constructed stereotypes of acceptable male and female deportment. As an example, open aggressive,

and competitive deportment is acceptable for a male to display. A female can display a competitive deportment while participating but must resume a more passive deportment when not competing (Dewar, 1990).

It is worth noting that the scientific knowledge about the body and the emphasis on “fitness” fits in nicely with the dominant ideologies of most western governments in the 1990’s. The policies that they implement are encouraging their citizens to develop “self interest” values and beliefs in the acquisition of wealth, status, power and individualism, which will contribute to particular social arrangements.

One of the institutions that is entrusted to pass on and develop the dominant values and norms is the school. Evans (1990) observes that “Teachers’ role in school is to equip pupils with skills of being consumers and taking responsibility for their future as buyers and sellers of work, leisure and health” (p.155). As Evans strongly points out, pupils will be provided,

... not with a knowledge about health or leisure, how these are socially and culturally constructed by family life, patriarchy or how it is vested with political or economic interest. Rather they will be presented with knowledge about themselves ... and how suitable they are individually for successful future health, sports and leisure careers. (1990,p. 158-159)

The Alberta Education (1988) Junior-senior high school curriculum guide, physical education grades 7-12, gives an example of Evans’ observation. The section that outlines the “Goals and Learner Outcomes of Secondary Physical Education” states the following: “Goal 2: The Physical Education Program Should Assist The Student To Develop,

Monitor, And Maintain Appropriate, Individual Fitness Level” (p. 2). The quote is being used to highlight that curriculum guidelines are recommending that pupils should be guided as to how to take care of their bodies with reference to fitness. It is important to be aware that there is nothing wrong with this recommendation. However, as Evans (1990) points out, the guidelines may not guide pupils to be aware of how the body can be socially constructed on what is acceptable deportment for males and females, for example.

It is safe to say that science as the dominant discourse of the body has its origins at the teacher training level and at the school level. This can be illustrated in one of the learning outcomes of the third goal of the curriculum guidelines: “students will develop: 1 physical skills, physical fitness, and [an]understanding of scientific principles of movement and the relationship of exercise to personal well-being” (Alberta Education 1988 Junior-senior high school curriculum guide, physical education grades 7-12, p. 2). The aforementioned guideline is not wrong in recommending that pupils should gain an understanding of their bodies from the scientific perspective, provided other knowledge is given equal time in the curriculum in informing pupils about their bodies, including an examination of society’s beliefs and values on what it is to be a male and a female in western society. The pupils could be encouraged to examine and question how stereotypes have been constructed. Through the examining and questioning process the pupils could consider the impact that stereotypes have on their perception of themselves and how they perceive other students within physical education.

If the scientific knowledge of the body is given a prominent place in the curriculum at university and school level, the teachers and pupils perceive the body as a machine to be shaped and molded towards effective and efficient movements in performing various physical activities. If the school curriculum is narrow in its choice of physical activities, the pupils will see a narrow range of body types being successful in performance. Therefore some pupils may perceive their bodies to be ineffective in performing physical activities efficiently. Hence the curriculum needs to incorporate a range of activities that will allow pupils to see a wide range of body types being successful. The view of effective and efficient movement could operate from a broader base in order that students with a variety of body types can successfully take part in physical activities.

### **The Commodification of the Body**

The business sector has a vested interest in perpetuating the belief that the sought after body shape is within individual control; especially if consumers buy certain products. Consequently, the body has become a commodity that can be bought and sold through the power of media. An examination of the advertisements on television and various magazines reveals that the image of looking sophisticated and desirable is represented by a youthful female with a trim body shape and good muscle tone. In order to achieve this ideal, many movie stars have their own personal trainers who design exercise routines. If film stars' genetic endowment does not allow them to achieve the sought after look they may take the radical step of having cosmetic surgery to produce a more desirable body.

Some western females may resort to bulimia, anorexia or severe exercise addiction in their effort to achieve the desirable body idealized by the media. Tinning (1985) highlighted the extreme lengths to which some women will go to achieve the desired body. He gave as an example, a woman who won the title Miss America, having to follow a very rigorous and time consuming routine to school the body into the title-winning body shape. She had her exercise bike brought into the living room so she could watch some TV shows with her family. After she won the title she still had to maintain the rigorous routine to keep her body looking good. Tinning (1985) also pointed out that this woman would immediately exercise the calories off when she allowed herself to indulge in a piece of cake.

In the modern consumer-driven society, the female body is positioned as a product by the fashion, cosmetic and fitness industries. These industries contribute to the “natural” order by positioning the female body as an object of male gaze and of sexual desire.

Although the physical education curriculum does not state that its aim is to guide the pupils along a fitness program to achieve the desirable body shape, the pupils could be influenced by the aforementioned industries and draw on them in their construction of what type of body shape they want to have. The discipline of physical education is a site where the body is out in the open to be examined by pupils’ peers and themselves. The role physical education could play with reference to the commodification of the body is to make the pupils aware that the media is trying to portray one type of body shape as the desirable one. Physical education could help to diffuse the influence of the media by



helping the pupils to realize that all body shapes are acceptable, and actually required for success in different activity types.

### **Schooling the Body**

From the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century I think it was believed that the investment of the body by power had to be heavy, ponderous, meticulous and constant. Hence those formidable disciplinary regimes in the schools, hospitals, barracks, factories, cities, lodgings and families. And then, starting from the 1960s, it began to be realized that such a cumbersome form of power was no longer as indispensable as had been thought and that industrial societies could content themselves with a looser form of power over the body (Foucault, M. 1980. Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977. p. 58)

The above quote from Foucault suggests that since the 1960's, most industrialized societies have used a much looser form of control over their citizens. An example of the looser control over people was in post-war Britain where an increased number of public playing fields were constructed for the working class youth to play competitive team games. Thus the youth were kept out in the open for all to see and survey (Kirk, 1992). This form of surveillance uses what Foucault (1977) would describe as the panoptic schema where many individuals can be observed at a glance and society as a whole can exercise the power of control.

Politicians, in post-war Britain, considered it appropriate that a watered down version of the bourgeoisie competitive games and sports curriculum be introduced into the state school physical education program. The intent was to instill discipline and control in the working class youth. The control of the youth was not through some heavy overt regime, but through surveillance (Kirk, 1992).

Hargreaves (1986) observes that physical education is centrally concerned with the schooling of the body. The areas in which physical education is practiced are rich in ritualistic behavior. Scraton (1987) has strongly suggested that formal and informal surveillance of the body is evident in changing rooms. As a teacher in Scotland I observed pupils lining up outside the changing rooms, in an orderly fashion, waiting for the teacher to unlock the changing room doors. Once allowed into the changing rooms, the pupils changed into pre-ordained physical education attire. They assembled in an orderly fashion to allow the teacher to take the class attendance register. Once those rituals were attended to, the class and the teacher could commence the main rituals of skill practice and game playing. At the allocated moment in time the class would be dismissed, to line up outside the changing room, to be allowed in, to be coaxed into the showers, to be hurried up to get into the school uniform and to move on to their next class once the necessary bell has rung to signal the mass movement of bodies out of the physical education department.

By observing one another on playing fields and racket courts as well as in gymnasiums and swimming pools, students learn to define the acceptable male and female bodies (Scraton, 1987). The meaning of the masculine and feminine body is socially constructed. The biological limits of what it is to be male or female are predetermined. However, there is a blending of the biological and cultural expectations and considerations of what it is to be a male or a female. Connell (1983) points out that “What it means to be masculine, is quite literally, to embody force, to embody competence” (as cited in McKay, Gore & Kirk 1990, p. 59). If the discourses of femininity and masculinity are not

in tandem with the biological and cultural viewpoints then the male and female students who challenge the stereotypes run a risk of being ridiculed by their peers as well as by their teachers (Kirk, 1993). For example, Martina Navratilova was labeled 'the machine', due to her scientific way of preparing for and playing her tennis (Dewar, 1990). If she was a man this label would have been a compliment, but because she was female, the connotation was that this was somehow unacceptable. Navratilova was a very competent tennis player, who won nine Wimbledon Ladies' Single titles and many other grand slam tennis tournaments during her career as a top international tennis player.

Connell (1983) makes a very important observation that the socialization process of girls in the early stages of adolescence runs counter to their biological makeup. The majority of adolescent girls have larger and more robust bodies than boys but girls learn to be "passive and fearful in relation to males" (as cited in McKay, Gore & Kirk 1990, p. 59).

MacKinnon (1987) and Young (1979, 1980) observe that the uncertain, apprehensive bodily movements of females are symptomatic of broader issues: females' bodies are considered to be gazed at, framed by society's beliefs and values, and invaded by the business industry that uses the body to sell products to the consumer. They also suggest that females are "physically handicapped" in their movements because of the negative and alien ways they relate to their bodies, which can be a result of the social messages that are sent out about acceptable feminine deportment.

I can offer several illustrations of MacKinnon's (1987) and Young's (1979, 1980) observations from my own teaching experience. When I caught two boys fighting in a physical education class, I stopped the fighting and informed them that their behavior was

unacceptable. In another incident I caught a girl hitting a boy, due to the boy annoying the girl. I reprimanded both pupils for being off task. The girl was informed that it was not “lady like behavior” to hit a person, and the boy was told to stop annoying the girl. However, the boy was not told that his behavior was “ungentleman-like behavior.” Thus, the girl was being told that there was a behavior and deportment standard that was associated with being a female. After such an incident the girl’s behavior could be controlled by a disapproving look from myself, the teacher, or the pupil’s peers, which sent out messages of what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior for a female.

Surveillance is not only used to control behavior and deportment associated with the gender of the individual, it also contributes to the positioning of people in time and space with reference to their body type. Hargreaves (1986) and Kirk (1993) suggest that the mesomorphic image portrays the conservative idea of having ambitious drive, discipline, sociability, healthiness and manliness. The mesomorphic image of the female body in the 1990’s is a “trim, taut, terrific body” that resonates in the patriarchal society to mean health, femininity, sexuality, control and also “desirability through the male gaze” (Mulvey, 1989). The individuals who can reflect the mesomorphic body images will exude confidence, have a high self-esteem and more secure self-identity and are more likely to be sought after as friends (Hargreaves, 1986; Kirk, 1993). The more individuals deviate from the preferred image, the greater the risk of social marginalisation (Hargreaves, 1986). Hargreaves (1986), Hendry (1973), Kirk (1993), and Tinning (1985) have all pointed out that physical education teachers and the more physically competent, attractive looking pupils will consciously and unconsciously interact effectively in and through the physical

education rituals of reinforcing one another's identities. Hargreaves (1986) suggests that the "lives of excessively thin or fat children and the clumsy, can be made almost unbearable in school and great pressure can be brought to bear on the rest to live up to the norm. In schools this pressure is felt at its maximum in P.E." (p. 170).

At the start of the chapter I described a few of my observations of adolescent females' behavior in the physical education environment. The body language that some adolescent females display in their physical education classes could illustrate that the girls lack self-confidence or, as Evans (1990), Hargreaves (1986), Kirk (1993), and Scraton (1987) have highlighted, that the discourses of the body in physical education reinforce the socially acceptable body. Thus the adolescent female pulling her large T-shirt over the area of her body that she perceives to be a problem, highlights a problem with the objectification and commodification of the body through the scientific discourse.

The literature review suggests that the discourses of the body, as gendered, as object, and as commodity are considered to be natural and unproblematic and that is the reason why I am concerned. I feel that the discourses of the body in the physical education program have impacted females' perception of their bodies. There is not a lot of empirical research to confirm that there is a strong relationship between discourses of the body in physical education and females' perception of their bodies. Thus the question that this research will address is:

"What is the relationship between discourses of the body in physical education and the perception females have of their bodies?"

More specifically I will explore the following questions:

- What are the discourses that females draw on to interpret their experiences in the physical education environment?
- What discourses have shaped their perception of their bodies and where have these discourses originated?
- Which discourses of the body are dominant and remain unquestioned by the females?

In chapter two, I will outline the research method that I used to explore these questions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Methodology**

In this chapter I will outline the features that Eisner (1991) believes should be present in a qualitative study. The research method that I used to collect the information from the participants was semi-structured interviews. I will discuss the considerations that I had to take into account when the participants and I entered into conversations about their experiences and perceptions of physical education. I will also describe Feher's (1987) model, which I used during the discourse analysis process. Discourse analysis helped me to identify the discourses from which the participants drew to understand their experiences in physical education.

#### **Working Qualitatively**

My intention as I began my study was to provide space for participants to share their experiences in physical education. Therefore qualitative research seemed the most appropriate style. According to Eisner (1991) qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to be sensitive, perceptive and inquisitive in her endeavor to understand the subject of inquiry.

Eisner (1991) believes that a qualitative study is interpretive. Qualitative inquiry aims to examine beneath the surface to seek meaning from the people who experience the events. For example, what does it mean for a woman who is only 4' 7" tall to play basketball with people who are taller and stronger? As the researcher, I had to know the participants' histories and the events that may have shaped their experiences and

perceptions in physical education. As Eisner (1991) points out, “. . . memories and interpretation of past events. What they experience is, in part, shaped by their personal history” (p. 36). I asked the participants questions about their family background, school life in general, and their experiences and perceptions of their physical education.

Qualitative inquiry allowed me to look beneath the surface to establish meaning. To achieve this I had to ask open-ended questions, to listen very carefully to what was said and to ask the participants to expand on words or statements that I did not understand.

Eisner (1991) points out that the style of writing used by the qualitative researcher requires the acknowledgment that it was a person who wrote the report and not a machine. To add a voice to the text, Eisner (1991) recommends that the report be written using expressive language. I used first person singular in the text and drew on pertinent stories from the participants’ histories that could convey a detailed essence of their experiences and perceptions of physical education.

Another characteristic that Eisner (1991) believes must be present in qualitative studies is the researcher’s ability to present a coherent, insightful report that has drawn from many sources. As Eisner (1991) points out, the reader is “. . . persuaded by its ‘weight,’ by the coherence of the case, by the cogency of the interpretation” (p. 39). Due to the nature of my study the cases for analysis were drawn from a group of females who discussed with me how they experienced and perceived junior and senior high school physical education. The significance of the report does not rely on statistical probability but on how the report resonates with the readers and encourages them to reflect on what they may have taken to be the natural order of things.



### **Gathering Information**

In keeping with qualitative work I chose semi-structured interviewing to generate conversations between myself and undergraduate female students from the Faculty of General Studies, at a university in western Canada. The volunteers for the study were invited to participate in two audio-taped interviews during which they discussed and reflected on their experiences and perceptions of junior and senior high school physical education. I identified female students in the General Studies program because I felt that they represented a cross section of the female population at a university in western Canada.

I used semi-structured interviews because this method allowed me and the participants to have face to face conversations about their experiences and perceptions of junior and senior high school physical education. Chase and Bell, (1994), Corbin, (1971), Laslett and Rapoport, (1975), Oakely, (1981), Rapoport and Rapoport, (1976), and Zweig, (1949) strongly advocate the need for interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Through face to face interaction, I was able to develop a friendly rapport with the participants. I tried to create a friendly, comfortable, and secure atmosphere where the participants could feel confident to volunteer information about their experiences and perceptions. First, I assured the interviewees that pseudonyms would be used and other details that could identify them in any published reports would be disguised. Secondly, I tried to create an atmosphere such that the interviewees developed a sense and a belief that they were not just mere objects for whom I wished to extract information. I developed an atmosphere where the participants felt they were valued as

persons who had a story to tell about their experiences and perceptions. How was this developed? I listened very carefully to what the interviewees said in response to the open-ended questions that were put to them. When ideas, issues, words or phrases arose out of the conversations I asked the interviewees to expand on what they meant. Through this process the participants and I were able to co-construct meaning around the experiences, of physical education for females in junior and senior high school.

It must be acknowledged that researchers believe that in order for conversations to be meaningful, insightful, and satisfying to both parties there must not be any hierarchical relationship between the interviewer and interviewee (Corbin, 1971; Laslett & Rapoport, 1975; Oakely, 1981; Zweig, 1949). The patriarchal model for interviews advocates that I, as the interviewer, ask the questions and the interviewee responds. Also, I was not to be allowed to voice an opinion on what was said and to diplomatically side-step any opinion-seeking questions the interviewee may ask. The aforementioned researchers all acknowledge the difficulty in finding a balance in developing a relationship with the participants and not prejudicing the answering of questions related to the study. I was very conscious throughout the conversations with participants in my study not to inadvertently pressure the participants to give answers they thought I wanted to hear. At the start of the interviews, I informed the participants that they should not try to second guess what they thought I wanted to hear. Throughout the interviewing/conversation process I was careful about how I phrased and articulated the open-ended questions and also the manner in which I interacted with the interviewee in the co-construction of

meaning. Futrell and Willard (1994) emphasize the need for researchers to exercise careful self-monitoring skills during the interviewing process.

Many researchers strongly advocate that interviewers should not view the interviewee as an object to be researched. Interviewees are “subjects” of their experiences and also “subject to” gender, ethnic, and racial inequalities which they find themselves having to negotiate on a daily basis (Chase & Bell, 1994; Futrell & Willard, 1994; Oakely, 1981). The term “subject” refers to “free subjectivity, a center of initiatives, author of/and responsible for its actions” (Chase & Bell, 1994, p.63). Chase and Bell (1994) also define the phrase “subject to,” to refer to “the experience of subjection to an inequality embedded in social structure and culture” (p. 63).

Research conducted by Chase and Bell (1994) prompted them to suggest that women can simultaneously experience themselves as active subjects and as subjected to a form of docility. This can mean that a woman can feel that she is exercising freedom of choice in a situation, and at the same time she may feel pressure to respond in a particular way. Conversations with women in Chase and Bell’s (1994) study highlighted that boundaries between women’s active subjectivity and their subjection can be confusing and painful. However semi-structured interviews allowed me and the interviewees to create the space to honor the lived experience of the participants. Through face to face conversations, the participants and I negotiated the meaning of their experiences. This was achieved through a mutual reflection on the meaning of words and phrases that the participants used to express their experiences. Futrell and Willard (1994) would describe this process as intersubjectivity.

What do the two parties gain from this style of research? Each interviewee gained insightful analysis through telling her story to me, the interviewer. This was made possible because I created a secure environment that allowed me and the participant to interact through conversations. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to deviate from following the outline of the pre-set open-ended questions. However, I had to justify the deviation to myself through a constant inner reflective process during and after the interview. For semi-structured interviews to be useful in research and the two parties to gain the most from the conversation, I, the interviewer, had to allow myself to be surprised. I had to allow some of my taken-for-granted assumptions about the subject under investigation to be directly or indirectly questioned by the interviewee. An illustration could be my belief that physical education was a worthwhile subject to be involved in. I also had to reflect during the interview and after the interview on some of the assumptions that I had held on the subject about which I wanted to gain a better understanding. For instance, I had to reconsider my assumptions about why some pupils are so reluctant to be fully involved in their physical education program.

### **Data Analysis**

Prior to the first interview with the participants, I designed a series of open-ended questions as a flexible framework from which to operate. During the conversations with the participants, I listened very carefully to what the participants were saying in response to the open-ended questions and consequently I generated more questions to allow the participants to expand further on words, phrases, or issues that I had not considered in my

preparation leading up to the first interview. These interviews were taped in order to capture the true meaning of the conversations.

After the first interview with the participants, I transcribed the tapes and I generated questions from the analysis of the first transcript for the second interview. When the second set of questions was generated for the second interview I consulted with my supervisor, as to the appropriateness of the questions. In the second interview I offered the participants some scenario questions, such as:

- You are given the opportunity to redesign the physical education program in junior high, what would you do?

Other questions included:

- Why did you keep comparing yourself with the other people in your class?
- What age were you when you started to play ice hockey?
- You said that you were not very successful. Why do you think you were unsuccessful?
- How did you know that you weren't being aggressive enough?

During the second interview I would again listen very carefully to what the participants were saying and ask them to expand on words, phrases, or issues that arose during our conversations. This was to ensure that I understood fully what the words, phrases, or issues meant to them and what impact they may have had on them as they made sense of their experiences and perceptions of junior and senior high school physical education. Once the tapes were transcribed from the second interview, the two transcripts were analyzed using Feher's (1987) model of the political and ethical regime of the body.

### **Discourse Analysis**

I have stated that I used semi-structured interviews to gather the data in the study, and I have highlighted some considerations that I had to take into account when I was co-constructing meaning with the participants about their experiences and perceptions of being females in junior and senior high school physical education. Audio-taping each individual student's two interviews allowed me to honor the uniqueness of the individual's experience as an adolescent in her physical education program. However, it was the group of female participants that was to form a case for analysis; the second part of the research method, analyzing the interviews using discourse analysis allowed me to inform the theory that there is a relationship between discourses of the body in physical education and the body perception of females.

The theoretical basis of discourse analysis originates from Bakhtin's theory that no individual operates in an isolated manner. We all enter into some form of dialogue with our fellow human beings to express our views of the world. The words that we use reveal the way we have experienced our lives in the society in which we operate. As Bakhtin (1981) states,

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (p. 276)

Discourse analysis helped me to identify the discourses which the females draw on to understand their experiences in physical education. Bakhtin (1981) suggests this does not happen in isolation. The ways in which females perceive their bodies today may reflect their histories in a physical education environment. For instance, a female who participated enthusiastically in her physical education class could be reflecting a history of verbal and non-verbal approval of her skillful performance from her peers and teachers. This experience contributes to the development of the young woman's self-esteem. On the other hand, a woman may not like participating in any physical activity due to being called "fat" or perceiving herself to be different from the majority of people in her class. She may interpret the physical education environment as a place of rejection and negative feelings about her body. Thus analysis will help me to tease out and investigate the relationship between discourses of the body in physical education and females' perceptions of their bodies.

To understand the discourses which participants drew on to make sense of their experiences and perceptions of their bodies in physical education, I used Feher's model of the political and ethical regimes of the body. Building on the work of Michel Foucault, Feher (1987) designed a model which can be used to tease out the "history of 'body building', of the different modes of construction of the human body" (p.159). He argues that the body is not a reality to be unearthed and set free from repression. Feher wants the body to be viewed as a reality that is being constantly produced. It displays the effects "of techniques promoting specific gestures and postures, sensation and feelings" (p.159). Foucault (1977) suggests that the present state of the body can only be understood if the

history of the construction is traced. Feher (1987) believes the history of “body building,” which refers to the various methods that a body can be socially structured, is both political and ethical. The political history can be understood by examining the relations of power. The manifestation of power is not necessarily through violence or repression. It can be revealed through a subtle combination of practices and techniques that act on the human body, which is the object that actualizes its manifestation. Feher (1987) refers to this as “a political regime of the body” (p.160). He developed five questions, which guided my examination of how the political regimes of the body are constructed in physical education.

1. “What system of differentiation characterize a given regime?” (Feher, 1987, p. 160).

A regime can differentiate performances of the body along the lines of good and bad performances.

2. “How do functions and objectives reflect power within a given regime?” (Feher, 1987, p.160).

Good performances are admired, praised by onlookers, and receive high grades/awards for the performance. This response encourages the performers to feel confident about themselves and the arena they perform in, whereas a bad performance does not receive the trapping of success. At best it is ignored or it receives ridicule and scorn from the onlookers. The humiliation is compounded by a low grade or no award at all being given for the person’s performance. Consequently, the performer feels negatively



about him/herself and is less likely to enter the public arena of displaying the performances.

3. “What specific techniques actualize the relations of power?” (Feher, 1987, p. 161).

The technique of performance is viewed from a competitive perspective which allows pupils to survey each other. The function of “surveillance” is to covertly and/or overtly observe. A person may be aware that (s)he is being observed but may be unsure as to what the observer is thinking about them. Pupils can use surveillance/observation to compare their performance with their peers and this can influence pupils’ perception of whether their performance is good or bad. It also has the effect of building, maintaining, or destroying a pupils’ confidence, which can determine whether they continue to participate and enjoy the activity. Alternatively pupils may cease to fully participate within the class because they are reading the non-verbal signals from their peers which suggest they are not effective performers within the context of the game.

4. “How do institutions integrate these practices?” (Feher, 1987, p.161).

Feher (1987) points out that “institutions do not cause or create relations of power; they integrate them” (p.161). An example is when institutions, like schools, bring together a group of people where they can watch each other. The physical education realm is an especially relevant focal point of the body.

School assessment procedures help to differentiate what is a good or bad performance. The power of differentiation between good and bad performances lies in how people internalize the knowledge that is generated from the assessment procedures.

A person who is informed through the assessment procedures that her performance is categorized as good will feel confident to perform the physical activities in which she received the good grades. On the other hand a pupil who is informed through the assessment procedure that her performance is poor will possibly feel less confident about taking part in the physical activity where she received the low grade. It has to be noted that formal assessment is only one method of informing people how effective they are in performing in physical activities.

5. "What knowledge describes the reality produced by a given regime of power?" (Feher, 1987, p.161).

Feher (1987) points out the knowledge constructed to describe reality "is a set of ideas adequate to the mechanisms of power" (p.161). Pupils are taught skills that are required for effective participation, which is to achieve the desired result of winning the game. Consequently actions are given labels of the "right way" and the "wrong way" to perform. In the act of labeling, people gain positions of expertise on what is the right and wrong way to perform actions. This becomes the knowledge of how to differentiate good and bad performances, and so the performer can be the "subject" of praise or be subjected to others' disapproval due to ineffective playing.

The political regime of the body is created when forms of knowledge and the mechanisms of power come together. It is important to remember the body is the "object" in which power manifests itself and also the focal point that displays resistance to power (Feher, 1987).

The second half of Feher's (1987) body building model is the "ethical typology" of people's relationship to their bodies. To understand how people relate to their bodies, Feher (1987) poses a question, "What are our bodies capable of perceiving and doing?" (p.163). To answer this question Feher (1987) develops four other questions.

1. "What regions of the body are considered problematic in any given regime?" (Feher, 1987, p.163).

The various stages of bodily development the adolescent female goes through can cause problems. The stages of development can represent differences which some adolescents may not want their peers to see, or discreetly gaze at. Some adolescent females may be extremely self-conscious of changing in front of their peers because their bodies are not as well developed or perhaps more fully developed than the majority of the females in the changing rooms. Thus they perceive themselves to be different from their peers in a negative way.

2. "In the name of what are bodily activities disciplined or styled?" (Feher, 1987, p.163).

Bodily activities can be disciplined through a variety of activities. Team games are considered to be valuable in promoting the concept of working together. Ethnic dance is considered valuable in promoting national identity and also in demonstrating expressive qualitative movements, such as time, weight, space and flow.

3. “What are the specific techniques that are developed to achieve a particular self-styling?” (Feher, 1987, p.163).

Students may use a variety of techniques to achieve a particular self-styling. The pupil may develop a technique of argumentative behavior which draws the teacher into an unproductive process aimed at persuading the pupil why he or she should take part in the lesson. The end result of the pupil’s resistance to participate is the teacher’s cessation of persuasion and the leaving of the pupil on the sidelines. The teacher will then proceed to teach the rest of the class. A pupil may participate in a game of field hockey where she will assume a position on the right or left wing of the playing field. This technique ensures that she is seen to be participating, but she is less open to self or external criticism for ineffective play.

4. “What are the assigned goals of these ethical practices of the self-styling of the body?” (Feher, 1987, p.164).

Physical activities are part of an overall curriculum which provides recommendations on the aims and objectives to be covered. The official curriculum goals include the promotion of skills improvement, as well as the integration of knowledge in order to promote effective physical performance. The pupil’s goals may on the other hand be different, and may be as simple as surviving to the end of the lesson because they have not grasped some of the basic skills required to be an effective performer.

The four questions outlined form an “ethical typology” of the body. The ethical regime can be woven into the fabric of the political regime, and can influence the

mechanisms of power as much as the political regime. A person can silently resist through marginalising herself from the dominant discourses operating in the environment. However the ethical typology can operate independently of the political regime of the body (Feher, 1987).

To complete the description of Feher's model of "body building," it is important to realize that the political and ethical regimes do not fully exist outside the body. These regimes can be internalized, but the body is the focal point where they can outwardly manifest themselves through exhibitions of resistance to or compliance with dominant discourses. Feher's model of the political and ethical regimes of the body is only one way to make sense of the body. For the purpose of the study the model provides a method to examine the influence of power and knowledge, which can impact the body either internally or externally.

The participants' verbalization of their experiences and perceptions of junior and senior high school physical education will open up an avenue for the political and ethical regimes to manifest themselves for examination. The body will not be viewed as a mere "object" to be investigated. Instead the participants' "subjectivity" and "subjected to" experiences and perceptions of their bodies in physical education will be honored as their stories. Thus the combination of semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis using Feher's model will allow me to address the research questions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Participants and Context**

This chapter will outline the process that I followed in advertising for participants to take part in the study. A brief description of the four participants' family and school backgrounds, an outline of the physical education curriculum that each followed while she attended junior and senior high school, and a brief synopsis of their experiences and perceptions of physical education will be included.

#### **Participant Selection**

The proposal was drafted to invite female students from the General Studies faculty, at a university in western Canada, to participate in the study. Counseling services are available to all registered university students, and as such the Ethics Committee was satisfied that the well being of the participants would be adequately cared for. I received the official clearance from the Ethics Committee to proceed with the study near the end of March 1997.

The study was advertised in the university newspaper, on nine occasions, from the end of March 1997 until the end of September 1997. Flyers were posted throughout the university and hand flyers were issued to some classes that had female students from the General Studies faculty. The advertisements resulted in four females coming forward to participate in the study. In the proposal I had stated that I would interview five females.

I had some difficulty in recruiting participants for the study. Reasons for this might be that in the first instance I started to advertise for participants when students were preparing to sit Winter term exams. After the exams, students were leaving the university in the middle of April and not returning until the start of the Fall semester, or returning for the Spring term classes that started in mid-May. Consequently, students were concerned with completing their exams and then seeking employment for the four-month recess or going on vacation before they returned to class in mid-May. It has to be noted that I recruited three participants from the end of March to the mid-April period. The fourth participant responded to the 14<sup>th</sup> of August advertisement. I asked the participants to inform their friends about the study and to let them know that I was still seeking participants. No additional participants came forward. I can only speculate that students were too busy with their own lives and that they felt their experiences of physical education in junior and senior high did not merit any need to be recalled to a stranger. The students may have felt that the study was seeking participants who had negative experiences in their physical education program, although this was not the case.

During the advertising process I never made any personal announcements in any of the classes that had female General Studies students. As a result, the students that I was targeting did not have an opportunity to ask me questions about the study. During the Spring semester, a Kinesiology professor distributed flyers to three Kinesiology classes that had some General Studies students enrolled. The professor explained the nature and purpose of the study to the students. Unfortunately no General Studies students from the

Kinesiology classes responded to the advertisements or to the professor's description of the study.

The participants who responded to the advertisements were four Caucasian females, with an age range of eighteen years to thirty eight years, from the General Studies faculty. They were all Canadian citizens by birth and their families have lived in Canada for several generations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

My original intention was to conduct the study in a junior high school. Adolescent females enrolled in physical education classes were to have been invited to participate in the study. In the event of receiving an abundance of volunteers to participate I would have selected three adolescent females; participants would have represented different levels of competence and enthusiasm for their physical education program. The selection process was to have been completed in collaboration with the physical education teachers. I had originally selected this population due to the literature review highlighting that there was not a lot of empirical research to confirm that there was a strong relationship between discourses of the body in physical education and adolescent females' perceptions of their bodies.

The original study was to be conducted over a semester. To address the research questions I proposed to conduct four audio-taped conversations and four observations of each participant in physical education lessons. I also proposed that the participants be encouraged to keep a diary of how they felt about themselves and their performances in



their physical education classes. The diaries were to provide the adolescents an opportunity to reflect on themselves and their experiences in physical education. The transcripts of the field observations and the contents of the diaries would have guided the conversations that I was to have with each adolescent female.

The proposal was rejected by the university Ethics Committee on the grounds that the reflective diaries and/or the conversations could potentially cause the participants to relive a trauma from their physical education program. I was not a qualified counselor nor had I access to psychological services that could counsel any of the participants if it was necessary. As a result the Ethics Committee deemed the study high risk and would not support it. Initially I was disappointed that the Ethics Committee did not give the study its approval. I eventually realized that the study had the potential to be quite distressing to participants who experienced difficulties in physical education classes.

The first limitation of this study was due to its not being conducted in a school where I was able to observe the students participating in their programs. This limited my ability to discuss participants' experiences and my own observations.

The second limitation was the removal of the reflective diaries from the study. The diaries were to allow the students time and space to reflect on their perceptions and experiences in the physical education classes. Through the reflective period of writing in the diaries they could have started the process of constructing meaning of how they felt about some of their perceptions and experiences. The conversations between myself and the participant on what I observed, their experiences, and the diaries would have added

more insight into the meaning-making of an adolescent female's experiences in physical education.

The third limitation of the study was not having the opportunity to interview the participants' teachers and gain some insight into what their hopes, expectations, and aspirations were for the pupils in their physical education class.

### **Description of the Participants**

The pseudonyms of the participants are Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa.

#### **Margaret**

Margaret was nineteen years of age, and was completing her second year of a Bachelor of Arts in urban studies, at the time of the interview. The syllabus of the degree requires students to examine city planning, zoning, transit planning, community developments and also to consider the sociology of cities. Her father was employed at a local printing firm as a dry print operator, where he made copies of engineering blue prints and plans. Margaret's mother worked as a secretary at one of the local institutes of higher education. Margaret had a sister who was three years younger. Margaret and her sister were raised in a low-to middle-income area of a large urban center in western Canada. She attended a small public elementary school, where she progressed to a public city secondary school that educated students from grade 7 to grade 12. Overall Margaret enjoyed her school experiences.

Academically Margaret was a very able student at school and university levels.

The majority of her academic grades were consistently in the high eighties and low nineties. Her physical education grade started in the low seventies in grade 7 and progressed to the mid eighties by the time she completed her grade 10 physical education program. She had wanted to continue with her physical education program in grade 11 and 12 but this conflicted with her academic timetable.

Margaret perceived her elementary school physical education to be organized on an informal structure. She described how pupils took part in some form of physical activity for a period of time and then they returned to their classrooms to continue with their academic lessons. There was no special uniform required for physical education and the children simply wore their everyday clothing.

Physical education in junior high school was an entirely new experience for Margaret; she had to go to the gym, playing field or even out of the school complex to participate in her physical education class. She was expected to change into a specified physical education uniform to participate and then quickly change back into her regular clothes at the conclusion of the class. In grade 7 Margaret initially found the whole process to be quite intimidating. She felt the act of undressing in a room full of other adolescent females to be uncomfortable. The process of changing rendered her visible for examination by her peers and her peers were visible for discrete examination by Margaret.

The physical education program that Margaret described included skills training that were related to the games such as basketball and volleyball to be played later on in the period. One of Margaret's vivid recollections was a sense of frustration with the

gymnastics program. The pedagogy allowed students to work their way around various stations, with a partner, and try some of the skills on a schedule sheet that was to be completed by each student. She found this experience extremely frustrating, especially when there was a skill she did not know how to perform. Rather than ask for help, Margaret and a friend would agree that their execution of the skill was close to the one shown on the work sheet, or they would skip the skill if they could not or did not know how to perform it. Margaret believed that there was more direct teaching when she was learning the skills for team games than for the gymnastic skills. She felt the teachers opted to teach the skills through the pedagogy of self-discovery because they did not have any expertise in gymnastics.

Margaret described herself as a student who was more than willing to participate in physical activities. However, when Margaret perceived the physical activities in the class to be played with an intense competitive element, she considered her own performance not to be adequate. Throughout the conversations she made it very clear that she wanted participation in her physical education class to be fun and her competitive peers to treat physical activity in a similar vein. Margaret did not appear to equate fun when an intense competitive element was present in the game situation during the physical education lesson. This fun element may have had its origins from her father's attitude towards physical activity. He encouraged Margaret to be physically active because it would be fun to take part in the "Mother's Day Fun Run."

Margaret volunteered to participate in the study because she had always wanted to take part in research. She felt the experience would give her some insight into what is

involved in graduate research and hopefully undergraduate students would reciprocate her enthusiasm to take part in graduate research for her master's degree. On the whole, Margaret considered her experiences in physical education from grade 8 through 10 to have been enjoyable because she perceived there was not a heavy emphasis on competition within the class time; although she would have liked to have had wider range of choices in activities that had a more leisure emphasis. Thus she considered it worth her time to come forward and discuss some of her experiences.

### **Maureen**

The second participant for the study was a 24-year-old named Maureen. At the time of the research study she was in her third year of a Bachelor of Arts in development studies, an inter-disciplinary degree. Maureen was born and raised in a large urban center in western Canada. Her parents divorced when she was four years old and she subsequently lived with her father until she was eighteen years of age. Her father was a railway driver for a Canadian railway company. Her mother worked as a camp cook for mining companies who had employees out in the field. Maureen had a half sister who was eighteen years her senior.

Maureen attended various elementary schools throughout the city. During her early years she enjoyed her schooling and her physical education program. Maureen perceived her physical education program at the elementary level to have been organized on an informal structure, where the pupils did some physical activity for a short period of time and then returned to the class to continue with their academic work. Maureen had

not experienced the formality of changing her clothing for physical education until she went to junior high school. The act of changing in front of many other adolescent females, whose bodies were at various stages of development, was quite embarrassing and intimidating for Maureen. She had been taught by her family to cover herself up and not to stare at other people's bodies. Maureen participated in physical education until the completion of grade 10.

In grade 11 Maureen experienced many personal problems and these manifested themselves in poor school attendance. The senior high school wanted Maureen to withdraw from the school due to her irregular attendance. She refused to sign the papers and so she officially transferred from a regular high school program to an alternative high school program for her grade 12 year.

The alternative high school population was 125 students compared to 900 students at the regular high school. The smaller school gave Maureen a sense of belonging to a community. Student involvement in the running of the alternative high school was one of the differences that Maureen liked. Every pupil, staff member and the principal of the school had a say in the running of the school. She enjoyed the smaller classes and the relaxed atmosphere that was prevalent at the alternative high school. Although Maureen enjoyed the alternative high school, she had difficulty in blending school life with working full time to earn a sufficient amount of money to maintain a basic standard of living. The end result was Maureen temporarily withdrawing from full-time education. She then tried to blend full time employment with correspondence courses.

Maureen returned to the alternative high school when her best friend's mother allowed Maureen to stay in her basement suite rent-free. The woman wanted to see Maureen finish her schooling. After graduating from the alternative high school Maureen attended evening classes at another educational institute, where she successfully completed her Biology 30.

Maureen's academic performance in regular school was quite satisfactory. Her grades ranged from the high seventies to the low eighties, but her physical education grades were bare passes. She felt that she was given a passing grade due to her turning up to class ready to participate and basically trying to survive to the end of the lesson. She felt that she did not know what was expected of her to become a better performer in her physical education program. This was a complete contrast to her physical education experience at the alternative high school where she was even surprised to find herself actually enjoying taking part in competitive games during class time. She perceived that she was able to participate in the physical education program due to the non-critical atmosphere. She saw people of all shapes and sizes enjoying themselves within the context of playing games.

Maureen described the regular physical education program as mostly skill practices at the start of the lesson, such as the learning of various passes related to the game of basketball. The skills were then integrated into a full game at the end of the lesson. She enjoyed her gymnastic class at the regular school because the teacher spent some time giving individual assistance to the pupils on certain pieces of apparatus. Her experience in regular school physical education was basically one of survival to the end of the period.

Maureen was interested in participating in the study because it was the first time in her experience that anyone was interested in hearing about students' experiences of their junior and senior high school physical education programs. She hoped that by telling her story, some recommendations could be put forward to make physical education an enjoyable experience for everyone.

### **Vera**

Vera was a thirty-eight-year-old woman completing her Bachelor of Arts in English. She grew up in a small community in western Canada, where her father, a car mechanic, owned the local service station. Her mother worked full-time at either the local bakery or the hardware retail store in the town. She was the third eldest in a family of five. She had two sisters who were older and two brothers who were younger than her. Family activities included picnics at local beauty spots and occasional family holidays in Canada. Her older sisters were involved in the local church choirs and one sister was also involved in the high school cheerleading squad. Vera's younger brothers were involved in the local ice hockey and baseball teams, both of which were coached by their father.

From the age of four until the age of twelve, Vera was a member of the local figure skating club. She regularly spent three hours a day on the ice, practicing the skills that had to be mastered for the Canadian Figure Skating Association badges. Every year the club would produce and present a Christmas ice show that was well attended by the community. Vera's ice skating skills were such that she could competently perform a solo ice skating routine as part of the show. At the age of twelve Vera informed her mother



that she would like to join the local girl guides. Her mother informed Vera that she had to choose between the ice skating or the girl guides as there was not enough money to pay for both activities. Vera chose the girl guides, which she attended for a year. From the age of twelve to thirty-five Vera never put on a pair of skates.

At the age of nine, Vera was admitted to hospital where she was diagnosed with a genetic disorder called "Turner's Syndrome." This genetic disorder manifests itself in low stature, inability to bear children, a webbed neck and a heart disorder. Vera did not have the heart disorder. The height that Vera eventually attained was 4 foot 7 inches. She described herself as being perfectly healthy in every respect and able to function like everybody else.

Vera described herself as an academically able student capable of attaining reasonable grades with the bare minimum of studying. Her academic school grades were regularly in the high seventies and low eighties but her grades in physical education were a bare pass. She disliked the physical education program at junior and senior high school. She regularly felt totally inadequate to take part in the majority of the activities due to her height. Her dislike of physical education started in the changing rooms where she was able to assess and compare the physical development of herself and her peers. As a result she felt different and inadequate. This feeling of inadequacy and difference was further emphasized when she tried to take part in the physical education class, which was mostly games, particularly basketball, volleyball and baseball. Vera's frustrations with her inadequacy in physical education manifested themselves through her constantly engaging

the teacher in arguments as to why she could not or would not participate in the physical activities.

At the age of eighteen Vera went to a university in western Canada to start a program in child psychology. She did not return to university after completing her first year because she had secured employment in a large urban center in western Canada during her summer holidays. She worked at a bank for eight years and then felt she would like a change of employment. A friend informed her of a couple who were looking for a nanny to look after their children. During her employment as a nanny she moved with the family to a city in eastern Canada. She eventually decided that she needed to finish her university schooling. Therefore she returned to a city in western Canada and started to work as a part-time nanny and attend university.

Vera volunteered to participate in the study as she felt her experience in junior and senior high school physical education programs was an area that accentuated her lack of height. She perceived the lack of height to make her look different from her peers as she progressed through adolescence into adulthood.

### **Ailsa**

Ailsa was eighteen years old, in her first year in the General Studies faculty. At the time of the research she had not decided what university program she would eventually follow. Ailsa grew up in a small community in western Canada. Her father had a law practice in the town and her mother taught at the local elementary school, on a substitute basis. Ailsa was the second eldest in a family of four. She had a sister who was two years

younger, a brother who was four years younger and a brother who was two years older than her. Her parents took a very keen interest in their children's physical activities. This was evident in their active participation on committees for teams that their children played for. Ailsa's father coached the local ice hockey, baseball and softball teams. He also taught his children how to play tennis. Family activities included downhill and cross-country skiing.

At the age of nine Ailsa enrolled in the speed skating club that operated in a neighboring town. Prior to this she was a member of a local ice hockey team, which her father coached. She did not particularly enjoy ice hockey; she was afraid of the puck and she did not display a temperament that was aggressive enough to be successful in the game of ice hockey. Eventually Ailsa and her parents concluded that she should try speed skating, as her skating ability was quite good. Her younger siblings eventually enrolled in the speed skating club as well.

In 1996 Ailsa completed a national meet with an official ranking of 34<sup>th</sup> in Canada for women's speed skating. She regularly competed at the provincial level. One of the reasons Ailsa selected a university in western Canada was the existence of an ice rink that was within easy traveling distance and that allowed her to blend her academic work with daily speed skating training.

Ailsa blended an active lifestyle with a successful academic life. She graduated from high school with a 91% percentage average. Her physical education grade was consistently in the top 10% of the class, which was the mid eighties. Up to and including her grade 11 year, Ailsa actively participated in her physical education classes. She was

unable to continue with her physical education classes in grade 12 due to time tabling conflicts with her academic studies.

The physical education program that Ailsa followed in junior high school was a skill-based program orientated towards team games such as basketball and volleyball as well as individual activities, especially badminton, cross-country skiing and gymnastics. The pedagogy was traditional, including skill practice followed by game playing near the end of the lesson. The gymnastics program appeared to follow a self-taught regime whereby the pupils would consult books and charts on how to perform the skills. Ailsa felt that she learned the least in the gymnastics program due to the lack of teacher-directed instruction, in comparison with the more teacher-directed pedagogy of other activities.

On the whole Ailsa enjoyed her physical education and the competition that was present when she participated in the games. Ailsa enjoyed the game experience over drill practices because of the uncertain outcomes that a game offered. She enjoyed the competition as it allowed her the opportunity to compare her performances to those of her peers. But it has to be noted she enjoyed competition only when she felt confident about her ability, or was curious to find out how it compared to that of her peers. If she discovered that her ability in an activity was not amongst the best in the group or class, and she saw no progress in her skill level after practicing for some time, she would eventually cease to be actively involved or be inclined to learn.

Ailsa believed the physical education program in junior high school started from the assumption that students already had the basic skills and ideas of how to participate effectively in some of the activities. She felt the physical education program at the

elementary level should prepare pupils more adequately for junior high school physical education. This assertion was made as a result of Ailsa's experiences in elementary school. The class teacher was expected to teach physical education to the pupils. If the teacher did not have any expertise in this area, the pupils got the minimum amount of instruction. Another teacher who had an interest would give pupils a bit more instruction, equipping them to participate more effectively in junior high.

The reason that Ailsa participated in the study initially was to tell of her high school experiences in the physical education program. In her co-educational class, she felt that she learned that males were better and stronger in participating in physical activities than females. Up until then she believed and had been informed by other school subjects that females could effectively take part in anything they wanted to. Ailsa stated that she saw and heard examples of sexism and racism in her high school physical education class from the male pupils and the occasional less than politically correct response by the physical education teachers.

### **Outlines of Participants' Junior and Senior High School Physical Education**

#### **Curriculum Guidelines**

The curricula outlined below include a description of the aims and objectives recommended by the provincial governments to physical education departments. I will also describe the dimensions that were recommended to physical education departments for incorporation into their syllabi. The guidelines also recommended a range of weightings for the evaluation categories; these will also be described.

**Vera**

The curriculum guide that was in operation when Vera was attending junior and senior high school in the province of Saskatchewan dates from July 1967. The aim of Vera's physical education program was to guide the students through a range of experiences, which would contribute to the pupils' mental, social and physical development. Physical education was intended "through selected physical activities and related experiences to assist the individual to develop skill, strength, endurance, and character to his fullest capacity" (Saskatchewan Education 1967 curriculum guide for division 3, p. 45). The curriculum was intended to give a wide experience of activities with an emphasis on group and team sports. The knowledge that the curriculum was to impart to the student was

An understanding and appreciation of the activities in which he participates. This would include rules, games strategy, officiating, game history, player and spectator courtesies, safety hints, equipment and its use and care, court and field dimensions (Saskatchewan Education 1967, curriculum guide for division 3, p. 145).

The curriculum guidelines emphasized that the program must meet the needs of all the pupils who participated, from the highly skilled to the less skilled students. The program was to allow competition for those students who wished to have it in their programs and also accommodate students who did not want competition in their programs. Pupils who had disabilities were to be encouraged to take part in a modified program.

The physical education program was categorized as follows:

Contents	Boys	Girls
a) Team Games	35%	35%
b) Individual & Dual Activities	15%	10%
c) Rhythms	10%	20%
d) Gymnastics	15%	15%
e) Track & Field	15%	15%
f) Developmental Activities	0-5%	0-2%
g) Camping & Outdoor Activities	0-5%	0-5%
h) Aquatics	0-10%	0-10%

(Saskatchewan Education 1967, curriculum guide for division 3, p. 146).

The curriculum guide outlined an extensive array of skills that were to be covered in the activities that the teacher would select for the program, such as basketball:

### Basketball

Passing	two hand; chest and overhead pass; bounce pass; one hand set pass; baseball pass; passing to moving targets
Dribbling	standing and moving; right and left hand; weaving around obstacles; dribbling races
Shooting	set shot; foul shot; right, left and center lay in shots; cross over lay in shots; cross over lay in; jump shot; shooting after dribbling or receiving a pass
Rebounding	
Offence	three man weave; single and double post

Defence            man for man; zone

Rules and

Officiating

Basketball Games: end ball; captain ball; side line basketball; goal hi

(Saskatchewan Education 1967 curriculum guide for division 3, p. 149).

In the curriculum guide for team games it was recommended that after mastering the basic skills, competition would follow. The evaluation of a student's progress in the physical education program was based on the student's achievement and improvement.

### **Maureen**

Maureen followed the Alberta Education (1978). Junior- senior high school curriculum guide. Physical education, grades 7-12. The stated objectives of the 1978 physical education program were as follows:

#### **Objectives and Physical Education**

- 1 The development of a strong body and soundly functioning body systems.
- 2 The development of recreational and utilitarian skills.
- 3 The development of a wholesome interest in physical activities for wise and constructive use of leisure time.
- 4 The development of desirable standards of behavior and the ability to get along well with other people. (p. 7).

The 1978 curriculum guide was very thorough in its outline. It recommended that the classes should be organized in squads; the rationale behind the squad system was to



“facilitate the taking of attendance, warm-up activities, and practice of game skills, team competitions or relays” (p. 7). The guidelines recommended that the squads be changed four or five times during the academic year. This was to ensure that students mixed with different students and that competition was equalized. The squad leaders were to be rotated to allow more students to develop their leadership abilities. The squad system had squad cards where the leaders were to check off student attendance and the dress of the other students’ in their squad.

The curriculum guidelines set out six categories that were to be covered and the core activities that were to be covered during the academic year, for example,

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1 Outdoor Team Games    | Flag football, Ice Hockey, Softball & Soccer   |
| 2 Indoor Team Games     | Basketball, Volleyball   |
| 3 Dual & Individual     | Badminton, Cross-country Running,<br>Handball, Skating, Track & Field,<br>Wrestling (boys) |
| 4 Tumbling & Gymnastics | Horizontal Bars (boys), Free Exercise,<br>Balances, Double Balances, Pyramid<br>Building.  |
| 5 Rhythmic & Dance      | Folk dance, Square dance, Social dance,<br>Modern & Creative Dance.                        |
| 6 Aquatics              | Swimming & Synchronized Swimming   |

(Alberta Education 1978, Junior-senior high school curriculum guide. Physical education, grades 7-12, p. 8).

In the curriculum guidelines for outdoor team games, indoor team games and individual sports, at least two activities were to be covered in each section. At least one of the core activities from each section was to be incorporated into the physical education program. The rest of the program was to incorporate tumbling and gymnastics, dance, and aquatics, if the facilities were available. The areas that were to be covered when teaching the physical education program were, history of the game, terminology, rules and officiating, selection and care of the equipment, skills and techniques, team play and tactics, lead up games and conditioning. The evaluation of the pupils' performances within the program was divided into thirds; one third of the pupil's mark was allocated to the pupil's skill, one third of the mark to the pupil's knowledge of rules of the games and the final third of the pupil's grade was allocated to their fitness testing.

### **Margaret and Ailsa**

Margaret and Ailsa followed the Alberta Education (1988) Junior-senior curriculum guide, physical education grades 7-12. Margaret participated in the physical education program up to and including her grade 10 year. Ailsa continued with her physical education up to and including her grade 11 year. The physical education curriculum for students in grades 7 through 10 was designed to allow the students opportunities to develop skills in a variety of physical activities. The physical activities were differentiated into four levels of hierarchical skill proficiency. The guidelines recommended that the students should be guided to develop the skills that were related to their abilities. The physical education program was compulsory from grade 7 through to

grade 10. The program recommended an allocation of 80% of the curriculum time to the core activities, which were aquatics, dance, fitness, games A & B, gymnastics, individual activities, outdoor pursuits. The remaining 20% could be used in an elective, which would have been used for remediation or enhancement of the core program. The guidelines also recommended that each dimension receive “no less than 10% of the instructional time” (Alberta Education, 1988. Junior-senior high school curriculum guide. Physical education, grades 7-12, p. 6).

The complementary program allocated 70 % of its time to fitness and a minimum of three activities were to be chosen from games, dance, aquatics, gymnastics, individual activities, and outdoor pursuits. The remaining 30% of the curriculum time could be used to develop a recommended component or it could be used on one or more of the recommended components. The other alternative was to use the 30% to allow the students to examine “contemporary issues, officiating, leadership, history, sports medicine, anatomy, Kinesiology” (Alberta Education, 1988. Junior-senior high school curriculum guide. Physical education, grades 7-12, p. 6).

The categories that were identified to be covered in the curriculum were broken down into individual activities that were under the category heading. For example, Games B included Badminton, Handball, Racquetball, Squash, Table Tennis and Tennis. Each physical activity was then broken down into skills, game strategies, and levels of proficiency that they were to be taught. In the Games B category the teacher was also to cover rules, etiquette, safety, officiating, terminology, history, and leadership.

The 1988 curriculum guidelines gave recommendations on how the students were to be evaluated. The guidelines recommended that the “students should not be evaluated relative to how well the best student in the class performs . . . evaluation should be based on the degree to which all students achieve their maximum potential relative to each objective” (p. 15). The guidelines gave a recommended range of weightings for the categories of evaluation:

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| a development and application of physical skills    | 20-40% |
| b development and maintenance of physical fitness   | 15-25% |
| c development of knowledge and understanding        | 15-25% |
| d development and maintenance of positive attitudes | 20-40% |
| and social skills                                   |        |

(Alberta Education, 1988. Junior-senior high school, curriculum guide. Physical education grades 7-12, p. 15).

In this chapter I have introduced the four research participants. In the following chapters I will use Michael Feher’s model of the political and ethical regimes of the body to analyze the discourses that the participants used to make sense of themselves while they were students in their physical education program. In chapter two I stated the uniqueness of the individual’s experience as an adolescent in their physical education program would be honored, but the total group of females would form a case for analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Participants' Experiences and Perceptions of Physical Education**

In this chapter I will discuss and describe the discourses which the four participants drew upon to make sense of their experiences in physical education. I have identified two such discourses: the formalization of physical education as a discipline, and the discourse of performance in physical education. The two discourses helped to shape the participants' views of their experiences and also their view of themselves in relation to physical education.

#### **The Formalization of Physical Education as a Discipline**

Schools have many rules and regulations that help to formally organize people within classified boundaries of time, place, and space. The school day is usually organized by a timetable. The timetable allows students and teachers to know exactly where they should be at a particular time in the day. Pupils know the text books, equipment and behavior that are required to operate effectively within any given classroom period. Each period corresponds to a particular subject area and the latter is further constituted by a formal curriculum, dress code, attendance record and performance standards. The result is the formalization of such disciplines as mathematics, English and physical education. Despite formalization of disciplines at all levels of schooling, the participants perceived their secondary physical education experience to be more formal than their experiences at elementary level.

Margaret and Maureen commented on how awkward they felt when they first went to their junior high school physical education classes. It came as a shock to them that they had to change into a physical education uniform when they went to junior high. As Maureen said, “all of a sudden in grade 7, we had to wear those terry cloth, skin tight, diaper looking shorts. That was a shock.” Margaret described the idea of getting changed into a physical education uniform as,

. . . being kind of annoying. The whole idea of changing. They are asking us to go out of our way to change for every class, in the middle of the day, and then change back for another class!

She also found the uniform to be irritating because “they would creep up, or they would slide down. They seem a uniform design, they fitted everyone roughly but they didn’t fit anyone well.” Margaret also described feeling awkward about junior high school physical education because it had been formalized into a separate activity.

In grade 7 it was a little more new and awkward to think about it as a separate subject. It was a big break in the day . . . because you would be out of the school building or in the gym and changed and everything. It was set aside from your other classes.

Margaret’s and Maureen’s stories illustrate that they found their junior high school physical education to be organized in a more formal structure. The school had set aside a particular time on a particular day for physical education to take place. The physical education department stipulated a particular physical education uniform that had to be worn while they participated in their lessons. Ailsa also commented that “our class

attendance would be taken into account for our phys. ed. mark ”; consequently the pupils’ absence and presence were recorded. Attendance records tended to formalize the experience of physical education in the eyes of the participants.

Margaret and Maureen perceived their physical education program at elementary school to be less structured. They were not required to change their clothing to participate in their physical education lessons. Hence, Margaret and Maureen saw their elementary physical education as less demanding. Margaret and Maureen explained that they were not required to rigorously learn set skills related to particular physical activities. Margaret explained, “When we were in elementary we would just go and play a sport for that period. It didn’t feel such a big deal.” Ailsa did not perceive the act of changing as a shock, as the elementary program in grade 5 and 6 required the pupils in her school to change their clothing to participate in their physical education lessons. Ailsa had been involved in formal team games from the age of six and she was accustomed to the formal dress requirements. Vera had no memory of elementary physical education, but did not like the act of undressing in front of other people in a crowded room in junior high school.

Institutions like schools bring a large group of people together where specialist teachers can deliver a formalized disciplinary curriculum. The majority of the time the spaces that are allocated for the delivery of the curriculum are classrooms. These classrooms could also be known as “disciplinary spaces.” Physical education classrooms can take the shape of playing fields, gymnasiums, games halls, swimming pools, racket courts and many other disciplined spaces that are required for the delivery of the curriculum. Foucault (1977) suggests that the main aim of the “disciplinary space” is

... to establish presence and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using. Discipline organizes an analytical space. (p. 143)

The disciplined space of physical education serves to establish first of all the presence and absence of pupils that attend the class. This can be achieved through the act of taking a class attendance by the teacher. Ailsa said that her attendance record in physical education contributed towards her grade. The act of taking class attendance is a very powerful tool for disciplining the majority of the pupils to attend their designated class, whether it be mathematics, English, or physical education.

Maureen did not like participating in physical education. She felt that she “just stumble[d] through it, and wait[ed] until it was over. You know, killing time.” I asked, if there was anything she could do about the situation. She said, “There was nothing I could do about it other than skip class, and I wasn’t going to do that. You just got yourself into trouble.” These are examples of how powerful the “disciplinary space” is in keeping the majority of pupils out in the open for constant examination by the teachers and other pupils.

Another technique that “discipline” requires to be effective is “the rule of functional sites” (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). The discipline of physical education had at its disposal provincial curriculum guidelines on what a department could have in its program. In the first instance the provincial curriculum guidelines recommended dimensions of the



core curriculum, including team games, fitness, and gymnastics. Physical activities were allocated to one of the core dimensions and recommended skills were set out, such as a variety of passing and shooting skills used in field hockey. The curriculum helped to structure what the pupils were to learn within each physical activity. Hence, the recommended curriculum constituted the “rules” which help to define the disciplinary space of physical education.

The formalization of the activities made Margaret, Maureen and Vera feel very conscious that there was an expected way to perform. Margaret explained that “the activities were more formalized and so it was like keep up with the other people or do as well.” Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa all commented on the format of their physical education lessons. As Margaret noted,

We spent the first couple of classes on particular skills, passing skills and we did different practices . . . we would practice different types of hits and throws. Then we would go into small groups . . . . Then we would go into more complete games with more of the whole class, towards the end of the unit.

The aforementioned quote illustrates that the disciplinary space was divided up into time segments for skills practice and game play; the latter provided opportunities for the skills rehearsal within a game situation. The format also gave the pupils time to observe each other practicing the skills and to see how well the skills could be integrated into the game.

Margaret and Ailsa described their gymnastics lessons as organized on a self-paced work stations format. As Margaret put it, “You would go around the stations and do the different activities . . . . It was a list of skills that we were to work on and check them off.”

Ailsa and Margaret found it very frustrating when they tried to learn skills for which they had no idea as to how they were to be performed. As Margaret said, “ we just ended up checking them off . . . . We would check off the main things and we do the ones we could do.” Margaret also perceived gymnastics to be very “ performance orientated. You had to do routines in front of the class . . . it was more visually orientated . . . . People watching you all the time.” Gymnastics was Margaret’s least favorite activity due to the organization of the time and space that made her visible to her peers.

However, Maureen enjoyed her gymnastics because the teacher broke the class up into small groups, which allowed the teacher to work with small groups of pupils on a particular piece of apparatus. As Maureen said,

I enjoyed gymnastics when my group went to work with the teacher on a particular piece of apparatus. You got more individual attention and you were able to ask questions . . . . But I didn’t like it when we had to go back out into the class.

These stories illustrate how the space that was organized for a particular activity made students feel more noticeable to their peers and their teachers when they had to perform out in the open for everyone to see. Maureen enjoyed gymnastics when the small group she was in received one-on-one instruction from the class teacher; in those situations she was able to ask the teacher questions about what she was to do. Ailsa and Margaret felt lost in their small group because they did not receive guidance from their teachers on how to perform the gymnastic skills. Therefore it would appear from Maureen, Margaret and Ailsa’s stories that their ability to learn and perform the gymnastic

skills was influenced by the organization of the disciplinary space by the teacher, and by how much direct instruction they received.

Participants felt that the level of formality within the disciplinary space of physical education was controlled by the teacher. The role of the teacher was to organize lessons that encouraged pupils to learn some of the skills that were recommended in the curriculum guidelines. Some teachers adopted a teaching style that created an environment that was not threatening to the pupils and encouraged maximum participation.

Margaret felt that her grade 8, 9 and 10 physical education teachers set an atmosphere that encouraged participation.

I think they were more into encouraging all the people. . . more focused on getting people involved in general, because it didn't matter if you weren't a star at sports . . . . The focus was just to be involved and to be active and to enjoy it.

Margaret's grade 7 teacher, on the other hand, emphasized participation through badgering and harassing those students she perceived to be less enthusiastic.

She emphasized participation, but she didn't make it easier for the people who weren't participating. She just make you feel like, 'Oh we're not doing well' . . . 'We're not doing what she expects of us.' So now you feel like a second rate student, like as though we needed to solve the problem ourselves of getting involved . . . I think that she could have done a better job in not emphasizing participation, but facilitating it, making it easier.

Margaret felt that the grade 7 teacher's manner of dealing with the less enthusiastic pupils could have been more friendly and persuasive.

I mean she wasn't mean to them, but she was more on their case than joking around with them, and making it easier for them to participate or making them want to participate. Or talking to them as to why they should participate, rather than just saying, 'Come on guys you have got to run.'

Margaret's story illustrates that the styles of teaching used by teachers can contribute to the pupils' level of enthusiasm to participate within the disciplinary space of physical education.

Maureen perceived her teachers to be demanding; as she puts it, they were Quite demanding of me. Maybe they weren't very demanding, but because I was having a difficult time performing up to quality, they seemed very demanding. I didn't feel that they were very helpful. I didn't interact with them very much . . . I don't remember any of them pulling me aside and showing me how to do something or ever taking a few moments after class to explain something to me; that never happened.

It would appear from some of Margaret's and Maureen's stories that their teachers had quite a profound effect on how they perceived themselves within the physical education environment, and how they understood their teachers' control.

The impact of a formalized, compulsory physical education curriculum up to and including grade 10, left participants with a feeling of little control. Margaret, Maureen and Vera felt that they were subjected to the physical education program and had little or no

say in shaping that experience. Maureen's teachers assigned each pupil to a group by counting off the pupils who were lined up. Maureen suggested that the teachers assigned pupils to groups to ensure that they were mixing with each other, rather than only participating with their friends. This type of practice filled Maureen "with dread." She says,

If I was with someone that I didn't know, or perhaps that I didn't like very much . . . [I felt a sense] that I had no say in the activities. I had no say in when I had to be at class, for how long . . . Who was on my team . . . There was just really very little choice. I wasn't given any latitude or anything.

Maureen's story offers a very nice comparison between regular and alternative school organizations in terms of how her confidence and sense of control were affected.

Maureen described the unique structure of the alternative school:

By and large we had control over our own timetables, we picked our own teachers, and our own schedules, and our own mentors. It was really supportive in the sense that it really encouraged the student to take control of the situation, and if they were not happy in that situation there was enough room for them to change it.

In the regular school Maureen had a sense that "There is no control. You can't leave the room . . . you have no say in the matter." Maureen felt that she was subjected to a curriculum with predefined outcomes.

One wonders if, like Maureen, Margaret, Vera and Ailsa felt that they had control in their physical education program. Margaret wanted the opportunity to choose some of the activities earlier on in her program, rather than in grades 11 and 12.

Some of my friends took phys. ed. in grade 11 and 12, and they talked about the opportunities of going curling for a few weeks, or going canoeing, camping, or golfing, or bowling . . . . I thought it would have been kind of nice if they could have incorporated some of that right from the start, at grade 7. To get you interested and to ease the transition and to make you interested in participating in those activities throughout your life. Rather than just making it regimented school gym activities and doing always the same . . . . I would have liked the greater variety so that every person had the opportunity to excel more in different areas. I guess if they had that I wouldn't have felt the need for choices so much as long there was a bigger scope for everyone.

She also wanted the opportunity to wear her own shorts and T-shirt to her physical education classes:

I think I would prefer if they would just let you bring your own shorts and shirts of a similar description, so that you like them for one thing and they fit you better.  
Allows you to express your personality .

These stories from Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa give an indication of how strongly they perceived the lack of control and latitude they had to exercise within a rather formal physical education. Vera wanted the opportunity to choose whether “to attend the

class or not.” In contrast, Ailsa was quite happy with her program, provided she saw she would be amongst the most competent performers.

It appears from the conversations with the participants that they did not view themselves to be in a position to challenge the mechanisms that formalized physical education. The participants were able to identify the mechanisms, such as class attendance registers, a stipulated physical education uniform, and a curriculum, which contributed to the formalization of physical education at junior and senior high school. However, they perceived the retribution the school would administer to them if they openly resisted some of the mechanisms to have serious consequences. Therefore the participants reluctantly accepted the mechanisms that formalized their physical education. On the other hand by taking part in the study Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa took the opportunity to verbalize some of the frustrations they experienced as a result of the formalization of physical education. By taking part in the study some of the participants hoped their stories would result in recommendations being put forward to address some of the problems they experienced.

### **The Discourse of Performance in Physical Education**

In physical education, performance refers to skill that is effectively and efficiently executed. Whiting's (1969) definition of skill illustrates the concept: “the bringing about a predetermined effort with the maximum efficiency and the minimum outlay of energy” (p. 70). The more skilled students are, the more effortless they appear to move their bodies in physical activities such as a lay-up shots in basketball. Students within a physical

education class learn what constitutes competent and incompetent performances by listening to teachers. Moreover, because of the highly public nature of performance in physical education, participants learn to view one another and make judgments regarding others' performances. As a result students learn to compare themselves to one another in terms of competence. This is how the notion of performance helped the four participants in this study to understand their experiences.

Participants learned how to differentiate between competent and incompetent performances. Margaret went on to clarify how she identified talent. "I guess I am comparing it to mine. I guess coordination and being able to carry out the skills that are needed to win games." She also noted that competent performances received public recognition such as "giving awards to the best players . . . Other people recognizing their successfulness . . . winning games and scoring baskets, being effective team players." Margaret perceived herself to be incompetent at unfamiliar activities:

I always felt that other people had to compensate for my mistakes, when I am less familiar with the game, less talented at it. If I get more practice and more experience, then I can contribute to a team effort rather than causing other people to make up for things that I couldn't do.

Ailsa's story offers an example of how she compared her performance to those of others and perceived it to be less than effective because she did not win too many games. "In grade 6, I took part in an inter-class badminton tournament . . . I thought I was quite a good player until I started to play against the players from the other classes." She went on to say that "I didn't win very many games." The end result was Ailsa losing interest in



badminton and trying other things. “I didn’t see any point in me spending too much time with badminton because I knew I wouldn’t be amongst the best and anyway I was involved in other things.” The two stories offer examples of how participants internally compared their own performance to “winning” performances. Margaret noted that winning the game also receives public recognition, which reinforces the labeling of competent performances. Therefore, performances which do not receive public recognition are thought of as being less than competent.

There are a number of techniques that assisted participants in forming judgments about performance. Foucault (1977) highlights that “The Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education ” (p. 184). He asserts that establishing what is normal helps to organize institutions like hospitals on what is normal health, and establishes standards that industries use in the production process. Foucault (1977) suggests that normalization, like surveillance, is an important technique of power. The normalizing gaze helps people to form judgments about competent and incompetent performances. Normalization is very powerful in asserting uniformity, but it also opens up idiosyncrasies for examination and comparison. In the participants’ experiences of physical education, normalization took the form of informal and formal assessment systems.

The research participants identified “performance” as a means by which students were differentiated from one another and coerced towards a particular standard or skill level. All four participants spoke about their perceptions and their experiences of operating within the regime. Everyone agreed that competent performances received the

public acknowledgment of praise from their peers and teachers. The institutions normalized and rewarded competent performances with high grades and awards while an incompetent performance was either ignored or received ridicule and or a scornful gaze from onlookers. Maureen explained when she missed a shot at goal some of her peers would pass a caustic remark, "Pity the goal wasn't wider." This informed her that her classmates considered her performance poor. The identification and classification of what constitutes a poor performance was publicly acknowledged through the school's formal assessment by the award of a low grade. The effect was to inform the pupils that their performances did not reach the standard for effective and efficient movement.

Maureen and Ailsa commented about being exposed to the standard set down to achieve the range of rewards for the Canadian Fitness Program, which was an external agent that quantified and qualified the human body as to the expected capabilities for gender and age. Ailsa enjoyed participating in the program because the teacher informed the class about what they had to do to achieve the various performance levels. She always set herself the goal of achieving excellence.

Our instructor would say, 'Okay all the girls who are here who are fifteen, for excellence level you have to do twenty push ups, for gold level you have to do eighteen . . . .' I say, 'Okay I want to get a good mark on this. I want to get excellence.'

Ailsa felt that achieving the excellence level was within her grasp; she says, "[I] felt a motivation to do my best and to do as well as could be done according to that test. I also felt that it was within my means to achieve the excellence level." She identified the origin

of her drive to perform well: “there was a certain level of competition among the class itself. Like some exercises you wanted to be able to do as many as the next person.” The other rewards that she received within the institutional framework were positive feedback from her peers and teachers, plus the reinforcement that her performance were categorized as competent. As Ailsa said, “I might not have been the best in the class, but I was deemed to be doing well enough by the Canada Fitness Test manual.”

Maureen found the experience of performing the Canadian Fitness tests to be extremely frustrating because she was a year younger than everybody in her class, and some of the standards set for her age group were higher than those set for her fellow classmates, who were a year older.

After many years of not even getting a bronze badge in a single activity, one begins to give up. . . I was a year younger than everybody. I was expected to be able to do more of most things . . . . That made it even more difficult for me. It felt like a very hopeless situation.

When I asked her where she got this information, she replied,

We were given charts on how many certain things that we had to do, within a certain time limit in order to get a badge. For instance in grade 7, a 12 year old sometimes had to do more than a 13 year old.

Her public performance did not receive the positive feedback from her peers or any reward from the Canadian Fitness Program for her efforts.

The Canadian Fitness Program that Maureen and Ailsa described in their conversations with me highlighted that there were very clear objectives for the participants

to achieve related to their age group and also related to specific levels of proficiency.

Maureen said that it gave a very public and tangible method by which she could assess her own performance and those of her peers. The physical education arena helped to integrate the knowledge that was generated from the Canadian Fitness charts and the award scheme to inform participants how their fitness level compared to that of other students in the class and what was considered to be the norm for their age group. It could be suggested that the physical education program inadvertently encouraged pupils to compare their performances.

The other formal assessment procedure that the participants experienced originated from the Alberta Education (1988) Junior-senior high school curriculum guide, physical education grades 7-12.

A recommended range of weightings for each reporting period was as follows:

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| a) development and application of physical skills.   | 20-40% |
| b) development and maintenance of physical fitness.  | 15-25% |
| c) development of knowing and understanding.         | 15-25% |
| d) development and maintenance of positive attitudes | 20-40% |

and social skills (p. 15).

In the Alberta Education (1978) Junior-senior high school curriculum guide, physical education grades 7-12, the recommendations were “one-third of the physical education mark for skill, one-third for knowledge and one-third for fitness” (p. 7). Therefore the guidelines and the implementation of the guidelines assisted the teachers in quantifying and qualifying the pupils’ performances.

The effect that the assessment procedures had on Margaret was to inform her that junior high school physical education was formalized and that she had to learn specific skills:

Getting a formalized mark on it made me feel really awkward . . . in elementary if it was the soccer unit we would just go out and kick the ball around and play. It didn't feel such a formalized activity and that you had to learn these specific skill and get marks laid out on a report card. I was thinking oh no! How do I live up to all of these expectations!

Margaret's comments suggest that the act of formalizing the physical activities made her feel that she was subjected to a standard of performance. However, she said, "I wasn't really sure what they were marking on." The lack of clarity made Margaret compare herself to the other pupils in her class and form an opinion that the pupils who were awarded the higher grades already had the necessary skills established to perform well in the physical activities. "They already had the formal skills, they knew how to do what ever pass or kick." Margaret's feeling of not knowing what was expected of her was not unique to her. Maureen felt she knew what was expected of her in her other subjects but felt unsure of what she could do to improve her performance in physical education.

In my other classes I had a good grasp of what was expected of me. Or what I could do to specifically achieve what was expected of me, whereas I don't think I ever got that sense from the physical education course. Short of suddenly becoming a super athlete I never knew what steps I could take to be someone who could perform better in physical education.

On the other hand Vera and Ailsa felt that they knew the source of their grades.

Ailsa highlighted that her physical education “mark was compiled from a work sheet from each unit, and a test from each unit, and an attitude, and participation mark.” During my conversation with Vera I asked her if she knew what made up her assessment mark. She replied,

Oh yeah. Because it was like, ‘Okay, we are going to assess you on this’. There would be things like rules. There would be a written part. So we would have to know the rules. . . . There were different things where different levels of proficiency were measured from for the practical . . . . If you were able to hit the ball X amount of feet. . . . It varied.

These brief stories highlight how institutional assessment procedures helped to create standards and mythical norms by which performances were differentiated.

Participants internalized those standards and applied them to themselves and their peers.

Although some of the participants were aware of the expectations of formal assessments in their physical education program, all the participants were conscious of informal assessments that circulated through their interaction with other students.

Margaret enjoyed playing with her friends because she felt there was a more relaxed atmosphere. However, she felt more self-conscious about her level of competence when she was participating with people whom she did not know.

I guess I liked it best when it was the least visible. When the focus was not on watching people perform, when the focus was away from that. . . [it] was more fun, because I felt that it was a leisure or social activity with people that you knew.

When you played with people you knew it was more of a fun thing and it was just a game. I didn't feel that my friends were watching to see how good I was.

Whereas people that I didn't know that well I would feel more concerned that maybe they were. They weren't looking at me as someone to play a game with, so much they noticed that I wasn't scoring any goals at all. So why bother passing the ball. I liked it better when the focus was more towards participating rather than watching each person do something.

When Margaret participated in a game situation with people she did not know, she felt more open to the "normalizing gaze." The normalizing gaze helps the observer and the person being observed to form judgments about competent and incompetent performances. Margaret believed that strangers would be more critical of her performance and this had the effect of making her more critical of herself.

Maureen's story highlights her experiences of physical education at the regular and alternative school. She felt the regular school program placed more emphasis on achieving competent performances. When Maureen attended an alternative school for her grade 12, she felt the school tried to foster a sense of community which gave her a feeling that everyone was valued. The alternative school physical education program gave her a sense that "There was less structure . . . . There was a greater acceptance of different skill levels, different body types, different objectives." The physical education program at the regular school was different. She explained,

I just found that the expectation in the regular school was one was a good athlete, who had already developed good physical stamina, good dexterity, hand-eye

coordination, that sort of thing. They were sort of expected to be given . . . they sort of expected that if you were athletic you were always athletic and those who weren't athletic were sort of dropped off by the way side.

When I asked Maureen why she believed this, she replied, "That was through receiving less attention in the physical education classes. Getting less positive feedback. Whether that was through tangible results like badges or whether that was an intangible like praise from either students or staff. Much less encouragement . . . ." Maureen's story highlights that the alternative school was more tolerant of people's differences; the norm included a much broader range of performances.

Competition is one mechanism whereby people are forced out into the open to become cases for examination for informal and formal assessment. The competition referred to here is at class level between and among pupils in physical education lessons. The term "case for examination" refers to Foucault's (1977) recommendations that "examination" is highly ritualized through a complex network of judgmental gazes that quantify, qualify and classify individuals. It also "combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment." (p. 184). For the rituals of the "examination" to be effective, the individuals have to be rendered visible to the disciplinary power of the normalizing gaze.

Ailsa enjoyed competition because "it gives me an idea of how well I am doing at something. It provides a way to measure my skill about my progress." At the same time competition offered Ailsa an opportunity to compare her performance to her peers. Their performances became a standard against which she could compare her own. She



explained that “Without peers it is hard to figure out how well you are doing things.”

Physical education offered Ailsa a space where she could apply her knowledge of competent and incompetent performances. Through her judgmental gaze she subjected herself to a self-styling scrutiny and at the same time objectified her peers’ performances.

The technique of competition allowed Ailsa and her peers to survey and examine each other’s performances. The manifestation of the power of examination can either promote or destroy a student’s confidence. As Ailsa said, “being told to do something differently meant that you weren’t doing something right, which meant that you were doing something wrong, which was discouraging. . . . It depended on my confidence level going in.” Ailsa’s comment illustrates how she was informed that there was a right way and a wrong way to perform a physical activity.

Vera’s story offers an example where competition was not officially promoted by the teachers in the physical education arena. “I don’t think that the competitive element was that strongly emphasized. I don’t remember that being excessive.” She believed that the teachers’ philosophy of using team games was in keeping with the official curriculum: “I think if you were to ask them they would have the standard answer of ‘to build healthy bodies and to teach team work.’”

However, the unofficial curriculum involved students in comparing each other’s performances. Vera remembered some of the caustic remarks. “You could hear some of the comments, and even some of the back biting. You know after the class, like ‘Did you see what she missed?’ or ‘Did you see how he blew that shot?’” The effect of the remarks on Vera was to increase her sense of insecurity.

It just added to my insecurity. I guess what it did! It just made me not want to even try, because I thought, 'There is no way. How do I know that it's not going to be me that they are going to be talking about later?'

The physical education arena offered an unofficial space for pupils to compare each other's performances. Vera did not need her performance to be actually examined by her peers because the remarks about other people's performances were enough to make her feel an object of possible scrutiny. Vera made herself a case for examination and consequently made herself an object of her own judgmental gaze. As Vera said, "A lot of this was not directed at me. It is what I saw going on around." Vera internalized the knowledge generated by judgmental comments as her standard of competence. She then subjected herself to a self-styling examination to ensure that she did not become the focus of hurtful judgmental comments.

It would appear that the regular school publicly acknowledged competent performances through formal assessment procedures and informal recognition through teacher and peer praise. The students who did not receive any of those acknowledgments concluded that their performances were not competent performances.

The rules of the game help to contribute to the public perception of a competent and incompetent performance and provide a standard by which plays can be evaluated. All the physical activities that were included in the physical education curriculum were governed by rules that were drawn up by various independent associations. Soccer, for example, is governed by the Federal International Football Association. The rules are set out to standardize how a group of people can come together and play the game. Court

sizes and equipment dimensions are all clearly set out in the rule books. Sports Associations also specify which players are to move about the court as well as the parts of the body or equipment that may touch the object that is used to pass through, over, or land on the target area.

Rules are designed to ensure that a physical activity is officiated as fairly as possible to the group of people who come together to participate. The rules also set down what is considered the normal behavior and manner of conducting oneself while participating. If a soccer player swears at the referee, it is an automatic red card offense and this signals that the player is being sent off the soccer field and that no substitute can be sent on to replace the offending player. Therefore the team has to play the game with one person missing from their team. Rules help to describe the reality in which a physical activity is to be conducted. They also contribute to the norm within the activity that is being performed.

The Canadian Figure Skating Association set down skills and standards that the skaters had to achieve to be awarded a badge for their proficiency levels. The scheme was organized so that the skaters would work at their own pace. Consequently, Vera says,

. . . [I] had no problem with it at all. I never felt it was a competition. I just felt like, 'Yes, I can get this.' It wasn't like there would be another girl in my group, that it would be between the two of us; like one of us would win and one of us would lose. It was, if I could get the badge. If I could do whatever was required. So basically the competition was with yourself. I never felt that I was competing with anybody.

Therefore Vera was not put in a position of comparing herself to any of her peers at the skating club that she attended. The Canadian Figure Skating Association developed guidelines on what skaters had to perform to achieve the proficiency badges. Vera appeared to be quite happy to work with the requirements as she perceived the skills to be within her ability.

Despite the emphasis on competent/incompetent performances in their physical education classes, participants succeeded in resisting the discourse of performance. Margaret informed me, “I always felt intimidated when I was playing with the athletes that were in the class. . . . They would look annoyed if I missed the shot.” During our conversation Margaret told me that when she got the opportunity to choose students with whom she participated she chose a friend or friends. Margaret described how she and a friend would partner up and work their way around the various work stations that were set up for their gymnastics lesson: “I felt more invisible if I was working with a partner who was a friend and they felt the same way as me about the whole thing. We would help each other out by saying that was pretty close and check it off.”

It would appear from the conversations with Margaret that she felt like an object for scrutiny from her peers when she was performing out in the open. She was very self-conscious of how the more athletically inclined pupils would view her performance. It appeared that she used their reaction to gauge how effective a performer she was and internalized what was being classified as the acceptable norm for the group. When she was participating with a friend they negotiated the acceptable norm for their performances in gymnastics. They created their own space to establish what was comfortable for them.

They exercised their agency in negotiating with each other and accepting their individual differences within their co-constructed space.

Maureen's sense of herself in physical education was "a genuine sense that [she] was incapable of performing adequately at the task . . . assigned." Unlike Margaret, Maureen did not have too many opportunities of being with a friend in her class. The odd occasion she did get to be with her friends in her physical education class "they would help [her] to sneak to the back of the line." On such occasions, Maureen and her friends were able to manipulate the system so as to exclude Maureen from a public display of her skills. Thus, Maureen was momentarily rendered invisible from the judgmental gaze of her teachers and peers. This small act demonstrated how Maureen and her friends could momentarily exercise some freedom as to when she would insert herself into the public arena.

Vera practiced a more vocal form of resistance. She explained that, "It was pointless in trying, everyone was much taller and stronger than me." She gave an example of playing baseball in her physical education program to illustrate her frustration with the program and with herself: "I could hit the ball with the bat, but I couldn't run fast enough to get to the first base . . . I was always run out before I really got started." She also talked about how pointless it was for her to try to play basketball.

It was really stupid for me to try and play basketball. Everyone was taller, faster and stronger than me . . . How could I shoot at the basket when everyone was taller than me? . . . the ball was too heavy for me to get it anywhere near the basket and I couldn't even pass the ball very well .

To exercise a degree of freedom over the situation Vera started to argue with her physical education teacher: "If I was in the mood, I would keep the teacher engaged in a pointless argument until he would give up and walk away."

Although Vera did not enjoy her physical education program she was a member of the local ice skating club, from the age of four up to the age of twelve. While Vera was at the club she worked towards various proficiency badges that the Canadian Figure Skating Association awarded. She informed me that she "always performed a solo routine at the club's Christmas ice show," which gave an indication of how confident she was about her skating abilities. Skating offered Vera an opportunity to perceive herself as performing at a level that was classified by her coaches, peers and the Canadian Figure Skating Association as normal. Vera informed me that she would "happily put on a pair of skates." She knew she would "be able to skate better than most people that are on the rink."

Ailsa did not mind being a case for examination if her confidence in her ability to participate was high. If her confidence in her ability was not too secure and she was being informed by her teacher on how to improve the activity, she would eventually give up.

If I was already doing okay at something, or didn't feel too awkward doing something, and the teacher said, 'Oh just do this different,' then I would be fine 'Okay I will do this different, no problem.' But if it was something that I was finding really discouraging and the teacher was trying to help me and stuff, I would just sort of maybe give up or not try as hard and be discouraged.

Ailsa resisted the teacher's assistance because the teacher made it public that Ailsa was not achieving the standard set down. The teacher inadvertently made Ailsa a case for examination and in so doing Ailsa was opened up to her peers and herself for objectification and subjection. If Ailsa could not demonstrate publicly that she was able to implement the teacher's advice she marginalised herself from public scrutiny and tried to short-circuit the public examination.

Study participants not only resisted but experienced resistance from their peers. Ailsa described an instance during which her peers exercised resistance to her competitive nature. Ailsa often became very agitated about the unfair manner in which students interpreted the rules of the game. She felt that their interpretations prevented her having a reasonable chance of winning the game. Her peers told her "to take it easy." The feedback from her peers encouraged Ailsa to reflect and modify her behavior.

If you get worked up about something or if you get really competitive you will look foolish. Like a phys. ed. basketball game is, after all, a game. Learning to just take things like that a little more easier, and that was learned through receiving positive feedback from my peers, and having more enjoyable experience when I took things easier.

Ailsa was made an object of scrutiny by her peers as a result of their perception that her behavior was too competitive for their comfort level. Her peers exercised their agency by informing her to take it easy and stop subjecting them to her frustrated behavior. The end result was Ailsa and her peers indirectly negotiating the level of competition that was to be tolerated within the game. It could be interpreted, of course,

that Ailsa had to comply with the majority's attitude. Through modifying her behavior Ailsa rendered herself invisible from her peers' judgmental gaze.

Margaret would have preferred to have seen more of a focus on leisure pursuits in the physical education program.

It is something that you have to be more motivated yourself, and it is not competitive, in comparative. But elements of going and having fun with other people doing some sort of activity is there. Rather than competing against them. It sounded fun, to me, hearing about all those different sort of activities . . . . If I had a chance in high school, and went out and did canoeing, hiking, rock climbing, or golf together, I might think, 'Oh this is kind of fun,' and go out and do it myself or with a friend later .

I asked her, "What did you see these activities as?" Her reply was, " going at your own pace. A way of getting exercise without having to feel like, 'I must exercise,' but just to go out for the fun of it." Margaret explained that the meaning of fun was " just at ease, as much as anything. Not overly conscious of other factors." I asked Margaret to expand her explanation of other factors. Her reply was,

What other people think, or am I succeeding or not succeeding, which were not things that were really worrying me in school. But things that were at the back of my mind. The activities that I enjoyed more were the ones where that wasn't there, I wasn't concerned at all.

In our conversation I asked Margaret about the activities in which she felt relaxed. She described how her sister got the opportunity to try some outdoor education activities



for example, hiking, rock climbing, canoeing and camping. She felt that “ It was also nice to do them with people who hadn’t done them before. So that is when you are at the same level.” The regular activities of physical education made Margaret feel that she was an object for examination because there were people in her classes who demonstrated a high level of competent performance and these performances became the standard against which everyone else was measured.

Margaret perceived leisure activities not to be constructed by rules of participation, or to have an overt competitive element. Therefore there was no objective outcome such as scoring a goal whereby her participation could be publicly measured. Margaret perceived the leisure activities as opportunities to participate not as an object for examination but as a subject who enjoys “ the social aspects . . . but not necessarily the competitive aspect.”

### **Reflections**

An understanding of competent and incompetent performances makes people knowable to themselves and to their peers. The political regime of the body is created when the forms of knowledge, such as how to perform skills and how to play the game, and mechanisms of power, such as observation, come together. When pupils participate in an activity with confidence, they perceive themselves to be fitting in with the norm.

When pupils operate around the fringes of the game, they lack confidence about their skill level to participate effectively; therefore, they marginalise themselves to reduce the chances of being exposed to verbal abuse and disapproving looks from their peers.

Thus lies the power and the knowledge of how we perceive our differences to be perceived by other people. Either we perceive our differences to resemble what is considered the norm or we perceive our differences to be a deviation from the norm, and through our docility we constitute our own oppression (Lorde ,1992). To be docile is not to create a resistance to discourses that may have an impact of encouraging students to have a low opinion of themselves, for example. However, Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa have illustrated that unofficial norms can be created to temporarily resist the full impact of the “normalizing gaze.”

The various techniques of disciplining have a very powerful effect of isolating individual students and opening the body up for public and private examination. The codification of the body is very important to the people who are operating within the functional sites where the codes are created and practiced. One of the powerful effects is to make the body publicly and privately knowable to the participants and observers. The manifestation of the power and knowledge operating within the disciplining sites is given a walking platform through the form of a body. The power of the observational techniques is illustrated by the adjustments that people make to their public performances. As Foucault ( 1980) points out, “ individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application” (p. 98). The internalization of power and knowledge are manifested in the varying degrees of docility and resistance that people will act out (Feher, 1987; Foucault, 1977).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discourses that Help to Shape Body Perception**

The research question that will guide the analysis in this chapter is: What discourses have shaped the participants' perceptions of their bodies and where have these discourses originated? Analysis of the participants' conversations showed that three main discourses influenced their perceptions of their bodies. The three discourses were the discourses of the performing body type, the discourse of the body as object, and the discourse of the desirable body.

The discourse of the performing body type reflects the way in which the discipline of physical education integrated the participants' perceptions that the athletic body was naturally given, rather than a quality that could be developed. In the section on discourse of the performing body type, I will also briefly examine how physical education conveyed to participants that most males are naturally stronger and consequently superior performers than most females. It must be remembered that physical education is only one area that helps to integrate the aforementioned perceptions.

In the section dealing with discourse of the body as object, I will discuss how the participants appeared to unconsciously view themselves as objects as they learned skills to improve their performances. Not only did they view their bodies as objects to acquire skills, they also learned how to maintain their bodies as one might learn to maintain a vehicle. Therefore they were developing the notion that they were completely responsible for the effective functioning of their body.

In examining the discourse of the desirable body I will briefly look at how the media industry influenced the four participants' perceptions of their bodies. Through the conversations with Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa, I will try to identify areas that have helped the participants to integrate or resist the media generated description of the desirable body.

### **Discourse of the Performing Body Type**

All four participants agreed that a person who was athletically inclined was “tall . . . not fat or too thin . . . and had reasonable muscle tone.” Throughout my conversations with Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa there was no suggestion that their body shapes were the reason for marginalizing themselves from their physical education classes. The physical attributes that appeared to shape the participants' views of themselves were a lack of physical strength, poor cardiovascular and muscular endurance, and lack of height. However, it was also their perception of how well they could perform the physical activities in the class that determined their self-confidence in their physical education classes.

In chapter four I described Foucault's (1977) concept of “disciplinary space” and how the discipline of physical education organized the space to allow formal and informal assessments, examination and judgmental gazes to control those operating within the “disciplinary space.” I will continue with the theme of “disciplinary space” in my analysis of “performing body type.”

Vera had a genetic disorder that was labeled by the medical profession as “Turner’s Syndrome.” She described the syndrome as “a disorder where one of the chromosomes isn’t quite complete. . . . It is not a physical deformity . . . basically it is the short stature . . . .” Vera explained that she was never in any pain and did not suffer from any of the heart conditions that some people with “Turner’s Syndrome” had from birth. It would appear that although Vera did not suffer any physical pain from “Turner’s Syndrome,” she suffered from people’s perception of her low stature. She stated that, “Basically I have always been treated like I was younger, because of my size.” During our conversations she mentioned that her family were all of normal height. I asked Vera, “What would you describe as normal stature?” Her reply was, “I mean basically anything that somebody doesn’t look at you twice.” Vera described situations in shopping malls, when complete strangers would come up to her and say, “Oh, are you ever short!” Her outward reaction to those situations was dependent on the type of day she was having. However, inwardly she was developing a sense that she was different from the majority of people. Vera informed me that she had friends and so fitted in socially at school. However, she had no boyfriends and so she felt that she did not fit into the “dating scene,” like other girls at her high school.

Vera perceived the discipline of physical education to be an area where she was opened up to public and self examination. She was not able to keep up with the majority of people in the class. She disliked physical education and explained,

I knew that I was going to have to go into the gym and try and do what other people were doing. . . . Everybody was running faster than me. Everybody could

throw higher than me, or throw further. Constantly I was not able to keep up, and was not at the same physical level that everybody else was. I did not like that.

The impact that this had on Vera was a desire not to take part in physical education because she felt, “Different! Like a failure. Like it was useless to try to do that, because I wasn’t going to be used in the game anyway. So it was a kind of a futile exercise. So why should I bother.” I asked Vera where she learned it was futile for her to take part. She replied, “I don’t think I learnt it, I guess I just saw it . . . . Yeah, I think it was something that I put on myself.” Vera explained “why she put this on herself”: “I was really seeing how far ahead the others were of me physically. Yeah, that was very disheartening. I saw them as being very, very far ahead.” In our conversations I asked Vera if there was any other school subject in which she saw people being far ahead of her physically.

I saw it. I mean just by being in the class. Physical education. That particular class was not the only one. It was the one that bothered me the most. Just because in a physical education class you can’t ignore the physical. In other classes if you are succeeding academically, at least you have that. Yes, I did see it in other aspects, but it was very underlined in the physical education aspect.

Vera’s body became visible in physical education. As a result, Vera’s physical strength and stature became objects of the gaze of her peers. She learned to compare herself to some mythical norm.

Within the disciplinary space of physical education, Vera was exposed to a curriculum that emphasized team games to promote cooperation and team work for a

common goal. The philosophy of team games promoting team work made Vera feel that she was not a part of the team. Vera illustrated this through a story about how she disliked playing volleyball.

Volleyball I really hated, because I felt it was very difficult to serve the ball correctly, and because there was always stronger players at the front. I just felt useless. I was a part of this team, but I wasn't.

Therefore the "rules of the functional site" (Foucault, 1977), which were rooted in the curriculum, helped to further underscore that Vera could not effectively take part in the physical education program. However, Vera perceived herself to be able to fulfill the tasks that her teachers of other subject were asking of her: "I just always felt that the teachers weren't expecting anything more of me than what I was expecting." Hence, physical education was a discipline where Vera established that lack of stature and physical strength set her apart from her peers.

I asked Maureen: "What did she remember the most about her experiences in physical education?" Her reply was, "The word that jumps to my mind is humiliation!" She explained that the feeling of humiliation was related to a feeling of physical incompetence. "I just felt physically incompetent . . . I wasn't athletic and so I wasn't able to perform the things that I was being asked to do." Maureen went on to explain to me what being athletic meant to her:

. . . I wasn't strong. I didn't have very good hand-eye coordination. I didn't have a whole lot of cardiovascular stamina. I didn't have a lot of the characteristics that are necessary; that I felt were necessary to be athletic.

Physical education led Maureen to construct a picture of an athletic person and to compare herself to that image. She always fell short and believed that there was little she could do to help the situation.

When Maureen attended regular school she perceived the qualities of an athlete to be naturally given: “ I just found that the expectation in the regular school was one was a good athlete, who had already developed good physical stamina, good dexterity, hand eye coordination . . . they were sort of expected to be given.” Maureen’s experiences of the 12-minute run test reinforced her perception that qualities such as cardiovascular fitness were naturally given.

. . . Like the 12-minute run, I think we only did that two or three times a year and we did very little cardiovascular work in between. So it was very difficult to improve between each one, because they just expect that you are already quite good at it.

Maureen described that after the 12-minute run test there was a post analysis of how everyone had performed and consequently she saw students who had performed well being rewarded.

There would be much discussion about who had run the most laps and who had run the least laps. There was lots of comparisons between people’s performances and there was lots of rewards for the people who had run the most laps.

As a result of these discussions Maureen learned that certain qualities contributed to the perception of an athletic performance. “That would be those people that are thin. I was thin, but I wasn’t strong. Quite tall. Being tall is an advantage and that was something



that I saw reflected in the people who seemed to be succeeding.” Maureen believed that the body type which was more disposed to being successful was one that had strength, endurance, co-ordination and height. Maureen appeared to believe that those qualities were naturally given and that there was nothing she could do to improve her own physical qualities.

However, Maureen’s story illustrates how the school structure can provide the arena to integrate what is considered to be the normal athlete. At the alternative school Maureen, perceived the whole structure to be less formal, with no competition and a greater degree of tolerance of people’s differences. The outcome of a relaxed school environment was a variety of people taking part in the physical education program.

Like on our team we had lots of body types that wouldn’t fit my stereotype of the perfect female athlete. We had women who were enormously underweight, and enormously overweight. They fit right in our team, because it was not expected that you had an ideal athlete . . . I can’t really picture very many of us on the alternative team as fitting in the regular team. I just found that the expectation in the regular school was, one was a good athlete, who had already developed good physical stamina, good dexterity, hand-eye coordination.

A school structure that nurtured an environment of tolerance of people’s differences encouraged students to operate from a broader notion of “normal” performance. The end result was more students with different body types taking part in physical activities.

Within the space of physical education, Maureen constructed what she perceived to be the required body type to be successful in physical activities. It was not until

Maureen left school that she was able to realize that she could improve the qualities that she associated with an athletic body. During the period between leaving high school and going to university, Maureen worked in a bookstore. The employment in the bookstore gave Maureen an opportunity to read information on nutrition and have casual conversations with people on the topic of being healthy. The information that Maureen learned from books and conversations with people helped her to start a work-out program with her friend Kate, when they commenced their university program. I asked why she started to work-out; her reply was,

I knew if I exercised regularly, that I would do better in school. I would feel better, I would be able to concentrate longer, I would be able to sit still longer. I would be able to carry my heavy backpack . . . The ability to push myself mentally and physically. Just a very holistic approach.

In our conversations Maureen explained why she did not work-out when she was at school:

I have learned more about things like nutrition and wellness. Including things like stress reduction or stress management. All those things that affect your physical body, that I never learned about in physical education. I learned a little bit about nutrition in physical education, but very, very little.

Within the 'disciplinary space' of physical education, the curriculum and its delivery helped Maureen to draw on and construct knowledge that informed her that she did not naturally have the qualities required for an athletic body. As our conversations

progressed I asked Maureen if she saw any value in her physical education program. Her reply was,

I think that it is valuable to know how to play some of these sports. They are part of our culture. You learn about team building and group dynamics. I think they missed a lot of important elements like stress management, nutrition and even the ability to pick areas where you want to improve and be given the opportunity, which is something that I was never given.

Ailsa believed it to be natural for a man to be stronger than a woman, and unnatural to consider the possibility that more than one woman could contest the natural order of the strength hierarchy between the genders.

I learned how to play sports, like basketball and volleyball . . . I learned that men are stronger than women, and to be a little less competitive, . . . things that I was learning in other areas of life. But they weren't clearly the primary areas. Like phys. ed. was the primary place that I learned those things.

Ailsa's comment prompted me to inquire further, "How would you feel if there was a woman who was stronger than the men?" She responded,

It wouldn't alter my belief that men are stronger than women because 'that' woman does not change the fact that the average woman is weaker than the average man . . . . Or if you picked a man and a woman out of a crowd he would almost always be stronger than she is.

Ailsa told me a story about a boy in her coeducation physical education class, which helped to construct the stereotype that males are stronger and consequently better performers than most females.

He wasn't fantastically good. Better at some things than I was. Similar to my ability level in some things. At some things where our ability levels were similar he would be better because as a male he was able to run a little bit faster, and jump a little bit higher. He had a lot more physical strength than I had, because of his gender. Overall he was probably a little bit better at most things than I was.

Ailsa explained that physical education offered her opportunities to see examples of sexism. She explained what sexism meant to her. "In this context I think of it as the existence of stereotypes regarding differences between genders, and people acting on those stereotypes, and treating people in certain ways." She also described the physical education environment as an "atmosphere that brought out the less calm, the less restrained side of people. They were less calm, less restrained about sexism, and racism, it was a more open atmosphere for that type of thing."

It would appear from Ailsa's stories that she perceived the discipline of physical education to be an area where she saw males displaying characteristics that were superior to her own abilities. The "disciplinary space" provided Ailsa the space to make herself and her peers "cases for examination." The judgmental gaze allowed her to quantify and qualify herself in direct comparison to her peers, which resulted in her internalizing knowledge that implied that it was natural for the male to be superior to the female within the discipline of physical education (Dewar 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Kirk, 1993).

### **Discourse of the Body as Object**

In this section I will discuss how the participants appeared to unconsciously view themselves as objects as they learned skills to improve their performances. Not only did they view their bodies as objects to acquire skills; they also learned how to maintain their bodies as one might learn to maintain a vehicle. Therefore they were developing the notion that they were completely responsible for the effective functioning of their bodies.

In chapter one I indicated that scientific discourse was the most dominant view of the body in physical education. Therefore physical education has been formalized through a particular way of knowing and a particular way of performing. Teachers of physical education have been educated on how to break the body into segments and on the best teaching styles to school the segments to operate as an effective and efficient whole (Dewar, 1990; Gore, 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Kirk, 1993; McKay, Gore & Kirk, 1990).

Foucault (1977) talks about body-object articulation whereby the body is defined by its relation to the object that it manipulates. The example he gives to explain this concept of organizing the body was the detailed instruction manuals that the 18<sup>th</sup> century Prussian army had written on how the soldiers were to raise their rifles. For example,

At the third stage, let go of the rifle with the left hand, the lock outwards and opposite the chest, the right arm half flexed, the elbow close to the body, the thumb lying against the lock, resting against the first screw, the hammer resting on the first finger, the barrel perpendicular. (Foucault, 1977, p. 153)

Foucault (1977) calls this the instrumental coding of the body. Through this very detailed coding, the body-object relationship is highly organized in time and space. The body and the object are to operate effectively and efficiently together like a well-oiled machine.

In physical education there are many styles of teaching that break the body and skill down into its component parts. The range of styles moves along a continuum from “Command Style,” which states that “the role of the teacher is to make all the decisions in the pre-impact, impact, and post-impact sets. The role of the learner, on the other hand, is to perform, to follow, to obey” (Mosston & Ashworth, 1986, p. 12). At the other end of the continuum is the “Learner’s Initiated Style,” where the pupil “takes maximum responsibility for initiating and conducting the teaching-learning” (Mosston & Ashworth, 1986, p. 228). Whatever style is used, the body is still being organized within time and space. The body and the skills are broken down and put back together. The difference is who sets the agenda of the lesson and the desirable outcomes.

In physical education the body can be objectified when skills are to be learned by the pupils. A skill can be broken down into three qualitative parts, called preparation, action, and recovery. Within the three stages of a movement, the body and the object being used can be located in space, time, weight, and flow of movement. When teachers explain and demonstrate a skill, they guide the pupils’ perception of where the body/object is located in space. The teacher guides the pupil to be aware of the timing of the body/object movement. The teacher would guide the pupil to be aware of the weight of the movement, such as the transference of body weight from one foot to the other foot, and the flow of the movement with reference to the smoothness and speed of the action.

These qualities of understanding movement can help pupils to identify what is required to move effectively and efficiently. An illustration of the codification of the body/object relationship is described below with reference to the performance of a high serve in badminton.

### Preparation

- Player stands with their feet a comfortable distance apart.
- Front foot is behind the service line.
- Body weight is on the back foot.
- Hold shuttle cock between thumb and forefinger.
- Hold racket using a forehand grip.
- Wrist cocked back.
- Racket head edge facing the floor.

### Action

- Body weight starts to move forward to front foot.
- Release the shuttle cock.
- Racket head and shuttle make contact.
- At the moment of contact with the shuttle the wrist uncocks to give the impact extra power.
- Shuttle goes over the net.

### Recovery

- Racket head continues with high follow through to the front of the opposite shoulder.

This is an example of how a skill can be broken down into its component parts with reference to the body/object relationship in time, space, weight and flow of movement.

The following stories illustrate how the participants sometimes viewed their bodies in relationship to the object they were using and how they utilized the information given to them to improve their performances. During my conversation with Ailsa, she described how a basketball coach had given her some information on how to compensate for her lack of height in performing a lay-up shot in basketball.

I remember a basketball coach saying to me once, ‘You know you are a little shorter, so when you do your lay-up, try to lift the ball a little more. Because you are shorter so you will have a little more trouble getting up.’ So I said, ‘Okay that makes sense; ‘I’m shorter [and] that will get the ball up.’

I asked Ailsa how successful she was in performing the skill after receiving the information. Her reply was, “Quite successful actually in the particular area of doing a right hand lay-up.” Therefore Ailsa’s body-object articulation was modified to compensate for her lack of height and consequently she was more effective in performing a right-handed lay-up shot.

Ailsa described another story of the ideal leg position for an effective performance in speed skating:

The right way changes slightly from speed skater to speed skater because every body is different. I have to skate a little bit differently than a friend of mine whose feet are three inches short[er] than mine. Largely it does remain universal. Both



of us when we skate should have a leg angle of 90 degrees. We should both extend our leg fully at the end of the push.

Ailsa's description illustrates Foucault's (1977) instrumental coding of the body concept. Instrumental coding refers to how the body was organized in space, time, weight and flow in relation to the object that was being manipulated. Ailsa described how a speed skating coach would video tape her performance and then replay it back to her, at some point in the training season.

I used to have a coach who would video tape us and we sit and he would pause on a frame and take a protractor out, and put it up to the TV and measure our angle of our knee. Then he would say, 'You have a 95 degree angle, you have to get lower.'

Ailsa's stories illustrate how her body was articulated in relation to the object she was using to perform a particular skill. The information that she was given was to improve her performance with reference to the timing of her release of the basketball in her lay-up shot. The space/angle between her upper thigh and her lower leg was to reach a particular point in space to create the mechanically efficient 90-degree angle at her knee joints. The effective flow of her movement was the full extension of her leg at the completion of her leg action while speed skating. To improve her performance, she had to improve her body/object relationship in time, weight, space and flow.

Maureen's story illustrates how frustrating it can be to try to perform skills when the basics have not been established in the first instance.

In phys. ed. it was like, okay throw a ball. But there is a lot of steps that can be involved in throwing a ball. If you don't know how to hold the ball, or if you don't know how to hold the rest of your body. If you don't know how to aim. None of those steps have been covered and you're not building on previous skills. You haven't built up your skill set. Then it is difficult to know what someone means when they say 'Okay, throw a ball.' . . . I think there was a lot of vagueness, a lot of assumptions that the students just knew how to perform the tasks.

The story illustrates that when the body-object articulation was not explained adequately to Maureen, she was at a complete loss as to where her body was in relation to the object. The student's timing, position and flow of movement were ineffective and she demonstrated an uncoordinated movement. Maureen and Margaret perceived that the physical education program in junior high school dealt with more technically orientated activities and if they did not know the basics they then felt another layer of difficulty had been added to their learning process.

Acquisition of skill is not the only method by which the body can be viewed as an object. The language of physical exercise belies a similar orientation. Ailsa explained the benefits of physical exercise in the following terms:

Exercise is beneficial on a lot of different levels. It increases blood flow, which is good. It increases circulation, which can be helpful to the body. It increases cardiovascular fitness, and muscular fitness, depending on what type of sport you are doing. They all involve varying degrees, which can help you maintain a healthy

heart and avoid heart problems later in life. It can be a means to control weight, because you burn more calories when you are exercising. If you are doing anaerobic exercises it can help you to build muscle, which can increase your metabolism. . . . It can help you to maintain muscle tone, which is good on an appearance level, but also muscle strength, so that you are able to do tasks in your daily life without injuring yourself, such as lifting heavy objects. It can allow you to maintain endurance, and energy levels.

Ailsa listed the benefits accrued to the body as a result of regular and systematic exercise. The language used to describe the benefits highlights how Ailsa perceived her own body as parts requiring regular exercise to maintain optimal fitness.

It was difficult to establish where Ailsa's view of her body had originated. During our conversations she informed me that "One thing that is often done with speed skaters, . . . with high level athletes, is testing . . . ." She explained the factors that were tested.

. . . to determine our lung capacity, the capacity of our blood to carry oxygen, our muscle strength as measured by our vertical jump height, our cardiovascular endurance, our muscle endurance measured by various test in which we peddle bikes. They measure the forces that we exerted by our legs.

Ailsa learned to objectify herself through becoming a "case for examination" for some expert who conducted various quantifiable body tests on elite speed skaters. Therefore Ailsa started to view her body, to some extent, as a machine. As she says, "I am still trying to come up with the best training regiment to suit my needs." She informed me that she was following "an elite speed skating training program." This program was to help

her to skate faster, which meant “an improvement in my personal best times . . . . When I skate in a meet, my personal best times are my way of judging how well I have done.”

Ailsa appeared to view her body as an object that had to be disciplined to achieve a measurable outcome with reference to her speed skating.

The discourse of the body that appeared to be dominant and yet remained unquestioned by Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa was the discourse of the body as an object. The possible reasons why the participants did not view their bodies as objects could be a reflection of the language that is used in society to encourage people to take responsibility for “their” bodies. The articulation of language is through the spoken word. Visual images help to convey particular meanings, and actions from family members are examples that help people to form the notion that they are not separate from their bodies.

Margaret’s dad encouraged her to view physical exercise and activity as fun to do. Through the notion of fun Margaret’s dad encouraged her to appreciate that physical exercise was beneficial in helping to keep their bodies healthy. Therefore the fun attitude helped Margaret to view her body as a source of pleasure and enjoyment, which would help to motivate her to continue in her fun exercise routines. Margaret observed that if something was not fun to do, then it was very difficult to maintain an enthusiasm to take part.

Although Ailsa appeared to use very mechanical language to describe the benefits of exercising her body and learning to improve the skills related to her performances, her language reflected that the information she had learned in relation to improving fitness and

skill development was all related to Ailsa the person, rather than Ailsa the body. As she explained, “Physical exercise helps to add discipline to my day.”

In physical education students were encouraged to develop a view that the information they acquired was related to them as living, breathing and thinking human beings. Information was offered to students to encourage the notion that they had some choices to make related to their performances and well-being. Therefore the notion of viewing the body as an object was not dominant in the participants’ perceptions of themselves. Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa viewed their bodies as a reflection of the integrated aspects of the whole person.

### **Discourse of the Desirable Body**

In this section I will describe how much of an impact the discourse of the desirable body had on the four participants. I will also identify the kinds of information which had the most influence on the participants in encouraging them to maintain or reshape their bodies.

In a capitalist society the body image has increasingly been used to promote many products to the consumer. Donavon Bailey, the 1996 100-meters Olympic Champion, has been visually associated with products that range from body deodorants and vitamin supplements, to Nike sports equipment. The image that is being sold to the consumer is one that identifies success and confidence with a variety of products.

Bordo (1995), Glassner (1989), Kirk (1993), and Morse (1988) have suggested that with the increased visibility of the trim, taut, terrific body in the visual media, a new

form of social control and regulation is being forced on the viewers. However, Kirk (1993) suggests “the incitement of desire has acted as an internal force, which regulates behavior . . . the exerciser voluntarily submits to disciplining” (p. 51). The power of the media images lies in how they persuade a person to internalize the messages, which are demonstrated through an individual’s self-styling and self-disciplining.

Kirk (1993) has observed “that body shape is often the pivotal point of focus in contemporary bodily discourse since it is the visual media, both in televisual and popular forms, that have been the main conduits for transmission of images and representations of the body” (p. 51). During my conversations with Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa, I asked about the magazines and books they read. Not one of the four participants could identify a magazine that they read on a regular basis. Maureen’s observation, “. . . I can’t remember the last time I read a magazine . . . I’m too busy trying to read my text books for my courses,” encapsulated everyone’s sentiments. Everyone mentioned that when they did get some relaxation time they would read novels, which ranged from historical novels that described people’s lives, places, perspectives, to feminist literature such as The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf.

Margaret, Maureen, Vera, and Ailsa were all aware that there was a particular body type being projected by the media industry. The impact that this image had on them varied. Vera informed me “I know that I should loss about 10 to 15 pounds . . . every time I sit down I can grab hold of a roll of fat around my middle.” I asked, “Why did you feel that it was between 10 to 15 pounds in body weight that you needed to lose?” She explained that “charts in books and magazines tell me that I should be 30 pounds lighter

than what I am . . . I think if I lost 10 to 15 pounds I would look okay . . . but I won't because I like my food too much." Vera had been informed through charts that she was over the "ideal body weight" for her height. However, Vera explained to me that "if being overweight was a threat to my health, then I would lose the excess body weight. . . . If my doctor told me . . . ." It could be suggested that the medical profession had some influence in Vera's perception of health. However, until the medical profession does intervene Vera was quite happy to gauge what makes her feel comfortable. Therefore Vera chose what made her feel comfortable rather than allowing herself to be controlled by charts on ideal body weight.

Although Vera indicated that she was not adhering to charts that identified her ideal body weight, she did feel that it was everyone's responsibility to take care of their bodies. She felt that ". . . if a person allowed themselves to get too fat, like 100 pounds overweight, then they are not taking care of themselves." Vera was not alone in those sentiments. Maureen and Ailsa also felt that it was one's responsibility to take care of oneself and one's physical appearance.

Maureen explained to me that she worked out with weights and had commented to her work-out partner, "I need to be careful and not develop too much muscle bulk." I inquired, "Why would muscle bulk be a problem?" Maureen explained, ". . . I don't want to intimidate the men . . . I want to have muscle tone and improve my physical appearance, but I don't want the bulk."

Margaret did not make any observation about other people needing to take care of their physical appearance. However, she did remark that she could do with losing some

weight off her hips and her stomach, but she felt “that required too much work to achieve . . . . I just exercise for the fun of it and something different to do other than studying.”

All four participants’ stories are in keeping with Bordos’ (1995) observations that almost all females feel that they need to lose some weight at some point in their lives. However, Vera and Margaret did not appear to be overly concerned. Although Margaret and Vera were conscious that they did not match up to what they thought they should look like given some weight loss or body toning, they were reasonably satisfied with their physical appearances to confidently operate in their daily routines.

Maureen commenced a work-out program that was to improve her stamina, strength, and concentration. The origins of this regime could be traced to the time Maureen worked in the bookstore where she had access to books on nutrition and health, and casual conversations with people on the subject of health. The information that Maureen had accumulated during her employment in the bookstore was put into practice when she commenced her university programs. Maureen commented that she was mixing with a different circle of friends who used the facilities at the university; as she said, “. . . my friend Kate helped to introduce me on how to use the equipment in the gym,” which helped to initiate her into the rituals of the “dos and don’ts in a gymnasium. Therefore the university was the site that allowed Maureen to integrate the knowledge that she had acquired since leaving school. In addition, the new circle of friends made it seem easier for her to try things out without feeling too uncomfortable about herself.

Maureen’s original reason for working out was to improve her strength, endurance, and concentration levels so that she could perform at her optimum for her



university courses. It would appear from her conversations that she was interested in improving her physical appearance through the work-out regime that she followed. Could it be suggested that at some point in her work-out program people commented on how good she looked, and consequently she wanted to maintain that recognition? Through her self-styling and self-discipline regime, she tried to achieve and maintain a socially acceptable body that would allow her to receive praise and recognition from her friends. The university appears to have offered Maureen an arena for her to integrate the knowledge she had gained since leaving high school on how to school her body to achieve the desirable look.

Another area that allowed Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa to discreetly compare their bodies to those of their peers was the junior and senior high school physical education changing rooms. Vera's conversations with me illustrated how powerful the norm can be in forming opinions about oneself. Vera felt that she was different from everyone else and that she started to notice the differences in her height in relation to her peers when she was in grade 5: "I started to notice that everyone was taller than me . . . ." When Vera went to junior high school, the bodily differences became more noticeable because she had to get changed in front of everyone.

That is where it all started . . . I could see that I was different from everyone else . . . the other girls were starting to wear bras and I was as flat as a pancake . . . they were developing body hair and I wasn't . . . I just felt very awkward and different. The changing rooms provided Vera with a mirror to compare and objectify her own body with references to the differences she perceived among herself and her peers.

Margaret, Maureen and Ailsa also commented on how they discreetly observed differences in other students' bodily developments. The effect that the bodily developments had on Maureen was a feeling of awkwardness; she said, "... my breasts were developing before anybody's else ... I felt very self-conscious." Ailsa was very self-conscious about her lack of bodily development and how out of proportion she was in comparison to the other females in her class.

I felt awkward about not having a bust and everybody else wearing a bra ... or so it seemed ... I felt out of proportion in relation to everyone else. I have big feet and thin ankles ... My basketball boots just seemed to accentuate how out of proportion I was.

Margaret was self-conscious about getting changed in a confined area with other people; she said, "... I was rendered visible for people to look at me ... I could also discreetly look back."

The changing rooms was an area where Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa could discreetly notice how their body development compared to that of their peers. If they perceived their body development to be out of step with the majority they then perceived themselves to be different. The technique of surveillance was powerful enough to inform them to feel comfortable with or awkward about themselves.

Surveillance is also a powerful technique to inform people of an unwritten rule of changing in the dressing room; as Maureen said, "I felt that I was expected to be shy and demure and cover myself. Avoid looking at the bodies of the girls." If she had not demonstrated the disciplined behavior of how to get changed, she felt that she "would

have been labeled as a tart.” Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa all spoke of the unwritten rule of changing quickly and not openly staring at the other girls’ bodies. However, all four participants mentioned they did not know where they had learned this way of being in the changing rooms.

It would appear from the conversations with Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa that there was a range of discourses that helped to shape their perceptions of their bodies. Some of the discourses originated from the time Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa attended school in general, including their physical education experiences. Some discourses have developed as they have progressed through their life’s journey.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Schooling the Body**

Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application . . . .

Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977.

Michel Foucault, p. 98.

In this chapter I will examine the tensions, contradictions, and complexities evident in the participants' experiences of physical education. I will try to highlight some pedagogical strategies that could help to alleviate some of the difficulties. Also, in light of the participants' experiences, I will comment on the notion of schooling the female body and identify some directions for future research.

#### **The Issues of Performance**

The discourse of performance encouraged the four participants to compare their performances with those of other students in their classes. The notion of performance also encouraged the participants to develop perceptions that particular body types were more naturally disposed to being successful in physical activities than other body types. The discourse of performance was compounded by the students' perception that they had limited control over their physical education curriculum. Below I examine each of these key assertions.

Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa compared their performances with those of other students in their classes. The power of the comparison process was evident in the ways in which the participants ranked their performances within their respective classes. Physical education involved assessment procedures that helped to inform Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa about how their performances compared to those of their peers. However, the stories told by the participants suggest that they compared themselves to what they considered to be the norm for the group to which they belonged. If the participants perceived their performances to fall short of the norm and found it difficult to keep up with everybody else, they either gave up trying, or they marginalised themselves from the main disciplinary space in which the physical activity was taking place.

Vera considered it a pointless exercise for her to try to play basketball when everybody else was taller and stronger. As a result of this view she marginalised herself from the game and resisted performing. She read meaning into her own body and the bodies of her peers as to the type of body required to be successful at basketball. She internalized this reading and disciplined herself accordingly.

As Foucault (1980) asserts,

Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its thread; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation (p. 98).

Students in this study constituted their own oppression by self-styling and resistance to the norm of the group.

The existence of a safe environment impacted students' participation in physical education. Margaret enjoyed participating in small team games, which her grade 8, 9 and 10 teachers used extensively. This was due to the opportunity to choose their teams. Margaret teamed up with some of her friends. She felt more comfortable in engaging in a physical activity with friends because she believed that they would not be critical of her skill level.

Margaret also believed that playing small games with friends encouraged her to become more involved in the game. This could be due to Margaret's perception that there were fewer proficient performers involved in the small games and consequently everyone had a chance to be involved in the game. This meant that there were fewer proficient players constantly informing Margaret's perception that her performance was less efficient. Margaret was given fewer opportunities to internalize knowledge that could reinforce her perception of her performance as less effective than that of other players.

In order to encourage pupils to participate in games, teachers might use small rather than full-size games. Teachers could allow the pupils to choose their own teams. However, teachers would have to remain vigilant on behalf of those students who tend to be excluded from teams.

Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa made sense of their experiences in physical education by comparing their performances to those of their peers. This being the case, the physical education curriculum should include physical activities that allow students with a wide range of body types to experience some level of success in performance. One activity that can accommodate a variety of body types and abilities is orienteering, where

pupils can either walk or run around the course. The emphasis for the pupils is on the development of navigation skills. National and ethnic dance could be used to emphasize cultural understanding. Pupils could also learn skills of planning and preparing for a cycling trip; the latter might involve the pupils in learning about maintenance of their bikes, road safety, and cycling at the speed for the least able person in the group. In any of these activities pupils would be less likely to perceive one particular body type being more capable of effective and efficient movement. The definition of successful performance and effective body type would be broader. As a result more students could have positive experiences in physical education and more positive perceptions of their performances. It should be remembered, however, that no matter what the activity, some students will always be more proficient than others.

During my conversations with Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa, they appeared to believe that the athletic body was naturally given, and outside of their control. Maureen perceived that strength, hand-eye coordination, cardiovascular and muscular endurance were necessary qualities to be successful in physical activities. The power of the athletic body caused Maureen to perceive the aforementioned qualities to be naturally given. Possibly the physical education teachers did not make it clear to Maureen that the qualities she saw on display were achievable and within her capability to develop. On the other hand Maureen may have made up her mind that what she saw was not within her capability and any information the teacher may have given her may have fallen on deaf ears.

Maureen described her frustrations when she continually experienced failure by not achieving any of the standards for strength, cardiovascular and muscular endurance set down by the Canadian fitness program. Maureen constructed the notion that the qualities being tested were naturally given. She constructed that perception because of class discussion with the teacher and other pupils relative to individual performances and comparisons among students' performances. However, from Maureen's point of view there did not appear to be too much explanation as to how to improve the qualities that were being tested. She perceived that the physical education discipline used the Canadian fitness program to test the students' fitness levels at the start and the end of the academic year, but the program did not appear to inform Maureen how she could effectively improve her fitness in the interim. If this was the case physical education departments need to be careful to ensure that the testing identified how the pupils performed. As a result of the tests, strategies could be developed to guide the pupils regarding choices about what areas to improve and how. Hence, the pupils could develop a sense that strength, cardiovascular and muscular endurance can be improved through regular participation in physical activities.

The discipline of physical education should try to emphasize that everyone is different and consequently each person has a different level of success. If the teachers could guide pupils to appreciate differences in performing body types, students might be less compelled to think less of their performances when they do not match up to those of the majority of students in the class. One possible strategy that could help to broaden the pupils' perceptions of performing body types is to incorporate a wide range of activities



that suit a wide range of body types, and consequently the mythical norm of performance and performing body type might be eliminated. The students could be guided into understanding and believing that there are sufficient physical activities in the program to enable everybody to experience a level of success.

Margaret, Maureen and Vera felt that they had no control in their physical education programs. It was possibly true that they had no control over the selection of physical activities incorporated in curriculum. However, the participants' stories illustrated that they exercised control within the program by the various forms of resistance used.

Vera described how she could temporarily control the teacher through argumentative behavior. The end result was Vera's teacher walking away so that he could teach the rest of the class. In this way Vera was able to exercise considerable control over when she was prepared to insert herself into the "disciplinary space" of physical education. Vera adopted the argumentative behavior tactic because she thought it was a pointless exercise for her to take part in the physical activities. She described how she saw students running faster, jumping higher, and generally performing more effectively and efficiently than her in physical activities. The physical activities in the curriculum helped Vera to construct a view that she could not effectively take part in team games due to her lack of height.

The difficulty that Vera experienced could possibly have been alleviated if the curriculum incorporated a range of physical activities that accommodated students' height, physical strength, cardiovascular and muscular endurance. However, physical education

programs are limited by their access to facilities and by the amount and kinds of equipment they have available given their budgets.

In cases like Vera's, it is also important that the teacher and pupils try to step past the argumentative behavior and create space and time to discuss what is at the root of the argumentative attitude. If the teacher and pupils can effectively communicate with one another and seek a remedy to the problems, the need for asserting control over one another could be alleviated. The teacher and pupils could develop a sense of co-operation by developing a program that could meet some of the pupils' needs within the discipline of physical education.

As a student teacher and as a teacher of physical education, I have read literature, have had discussions with colleagues, and have attended in-service training on appropriate teaching styles to be used in the teaching of various physical activities. The gymnastics stories told by Margaret and Ailsa illustrated the perceived lack of control they experienced in trying to learn gymnastic skills by the self-paced, discovery-learning teaching style. Margaret and Ailsa believed that they learned more when the teachers used the teacher-directed style in the other physical activities.

Margaret and Ailsa did not perceive that discovery learning allowed them to learn at their own speed and ability levels. Neither participant asked their teachers for assistance when they encountered a problem in learning a particular gymnastic skill, and as such some of their frustrations in learning by discovery were self-inflicted. Of course the teacher could have explained to the class why he/she had adopted the discovery-learning approach. Discovery-learning can allow pupils to work at their own pace and level as well

as to safely discover various problem-solving strategies. However, the teachers could have made it clear to the pupils that although the approach was discovery-learning they were available for guidance. In such circumstances Margaret and Ailsa might have entered into the spirit of taking some control over their learning process, rather than feeling that they had no control.

Although discovery-learning is to give the pupils an opportunity to work at their own pace and ability level, the pupils must be aware that effective learning requires them to communicate with their teachers. At the same time the teacher must ensure that the pupils are aware of the need to communicate effectively. Of course much of this depends on the teacher's ability to create an environment that facilitates discussion about problems students may experience in their learning processes.

### **The Issues of Formalization**

The first section of this chapter highlighted the problems that the participants experienced with reference to their views of their own performances. In this section I will discuss the structures that the participants identified as giving physical education an air of formalization. As a result of the discussion, I will put forward some suggestions that could help to modify the formal nature of the discipline of physical education.

Junior and senior high schools often bring a large population of 900 to 1,500 students together. To organize such a large group of students, schools have many rules and regulations that help to formally organize students within the boundaries of time and space. The school day is usually organized by a timetable which informs the teachers and

students where they should be at a particular time in the day. Each period corresponds to a particular subject area ; the latter is further constituted by a formal curriculum, dress code, attendance record and performance standards. The impact of such organization is the formalization of such disciplines as science, social studies, and physical education. Despite formalization at all levels of school, the participants felt that their secondary physical education experience was much more formal than in the elementary school.

The participants perceived secondary physical education to be more formally organized due to such practices as changing into prescribed physical education attire, the assignment of official grades, and the delineation of specific skills to be learned.

The act of changing into stipulated physical education attire indicated to Margaret and Maureen that there was an expected way to be dressed to take part in their physical education classes. They felt that students should be allowed to choose their own physical education dress. In this way students could choose garments that they felt were more comfortable for participating in physical activities.

As a teacher of physical education I can understand the participants' desire to choose their own physical activity clothing. However, I can also understand why physical education departments stipulate attire. Teachers want to ensure that everyone is wearing reasonably inexpensive garments that everyone can afford. It is also to ensure the students who come from financially secure families do not intimidate less fortunate students with designer label leisure clothing.

Teachers and the students could negotiate a middle ground whereby the students are given an opportunity to choose from a recommended selection of clothing considered

suitable for participation. Department heads could inform the pupils' parents or guardians about the price range for the clothing and explain the logic behind the recommendations. Pupils could be given the opportunity to make some choices about what they can wear to participate comfortably in their physical education program.

The second issue that I would like to discuss is the physical education curriculum. The participants perceived the program of study as having an air of formalization. The program of study in physical education departments follows provincial curriculum guidelines that offer recommendations on what the departments may incorporate into their syllabi.

The problem that the participants appeared to have with some of the physical activities was the delivery of the content by the teachers. Margaret, Maureen and Vera did not appear to enjoy their programs when they were expected to participate in full size games, because they felt they were open to examination by their peers. They appeared to be more comfortable when they were participating in smaller games with friends. Teachers could place more emphasis on using small games to rehearse and implement the game skills. To add to the students' comfort while they are participating in the small games, teachers could allow students opportunities to participate with their friends. Margaret felt that small games encouraged her to become more involved because there were fewer players involved in the game. She also felt the smaller games had fewer competent players to dominate the game and consequently she perceived her efforts to play were as effective as those of the other players.

The participants also commented that they enjoyed the small games when they did not keep the score. They felt it was not necessary to know who was winning or losing the game. The main aim and objective for them was to enjoy being with friends and having the opportunity to participate in an activity where the outcome was not measured by the number of points scored. Teachers could deliver programs that allow students to design games or physical activities that meet the needs of the students in the particular group. Teachers could inform the students that the emphasis is not on performance but on negotiating ways to ensure that everyone in the group is fully involved and making a contribution. To ensure that the spotlight is not on performance, teachers could make the assessable elements of the unit be cooperation within a group set-up and the ability to solve problems in a positive manner.

Although I am advocating that teachers try to deliver a program that encourages the students to take some responsibility for their learning, I am not suggesting that the teachers be positioned on the sidelines as observers. Teachers must make it clear to the students that they are facilitators of their learning. If a teacher observes a student experiencing problems in participating effectively in a physical activity, the teacher could work with the student to identify areas in the activity that would utilize the student's strengths. If, for example, the pupil is the smallest player on the team, but has good spatial awareness of the game and can make effective passes to other players, the teacher could guide the pupil to utilize those strengths in a game situation. Hence the program is modified to accommodate the pupils in the class and everyone feels that they have something worthwhile to contribute to the lessons.

Another method that could help to modify the formal nature of physical education is a multi-disciplinary approach to the delivery of the program. Physical education teachers could blend some programs with those of other disciplines in order to blur the boundaries between the disciplines. An illustration of the multi-disciplinary approach can be drawn from one of my experiences as a teacher of physical education in the Shetland Islands. As a result of conversations between my colleague and myself, we discovered that we taught the same grade 8 class of females. My colleague was working with the class on a circus theme. She wanted the students to visualize and draw performers performing some gymnastic skills. At the same time I was teaching the class gymnastics. To give the students visual models to work with in their art class I filmed their gymnastic routines that they were working on during my class time. I gave the art teacher the film for her to use when she had the class for art.

The impact of this unofficial multi-disciplinary approach was students not viewing art and physical education as separate subjects but as subjects that could inform each other on how to view the body in motion. Initially the physical education program taught the students some gymnastics skills and the art lessons helped the students to see how their bodies occupied space. When the students were participating in their gymnastics program they started to view their bodies in terms of how they occupied space and created various shapes, rather than merely concentrating on how well they were performing the gymnastic skills.

Multi-disciplinary approaches can also help to modify the perception that physical education is only concerned with performance. I will draw on one of my own stories as a

teacher in the Shetland Islands. In the mid 1980's, secondary school departments in Scotland were encouraged to form cluster groups to design programs to help the students not to view subjects as separate entities but to consider the cluster program as helping them to develop as people. Physical education was grouped with home economics and biology. The theme was the well-being of the student. Teachers from the three disciplinary areas worked together to develop a coordinated approach to help students make informed choices about how to promote their own well-being. The biology department designed a program that was to explain what happened to the body when the student exercised. The home economics department designed a program that was to inform the students about the importance of nutrition. The physical education department was to provide the practical experience for the other two disciplines. The emphasis from the physical education department was not on performance but on guiding pupils to integrate knowledge from other disciplines. The knowledge was to help the students to make informed choices about how to improve areas of their fitness and well-being. The teachers coordinated a program such that each drew upon the content of the other disciplines. The teachers helped the students to form bridges between subjects.

The purpose of the multi-disciplinary approach was to encourage students to view their education in a broader light. The teachers who were involved in a multi-disciplinary program were encouraged to view physical education not as a separate entity but as part of a larger picture in the development and education of students. It has to be remembered that I have only offered suggestions on how to modify the formalization of physical



education. Every suggestion made will have problems to overcome, but these problems can be solved.

### **Schooling the Female Body**

As a teacher of physical education, in Scotland, I observed many adolescent females who were reluctant performers in their physical education program. Over the years I noticed that more females than males tried to opt out of their physical education classes. Some females established a regular pattern of not bringing their physical education clothing with them to their physical education class, or they regularly handed in notes from their parents or guardians to excuse them from participating in the lessons. Hence, as a teacher I wanted to examine females' perceptions and experiences of physical education. I had hoped to understand why some females opted either out of or into their physical education programs.

Hargreaves (1986) and Kirk (1993) have suggested that physical education is centrally concerned with the schooling of the body. Kirk (1993) suggests that physical education is a key site for the learning of the "techniques of the body in ways which demand conformity to dominant social and cultural values and norms" (p. 29). Connell (1983) observed that adolescent females learn to be passive and submissive. Hence I wanted to understand what impact physical education had on the schooling of the female body.

McKay, Gore and Kirk (1990) highlighted in their work that student teachers of physical education have to take more compulsory courses in the biological sciences than in

the humanities and social sciences, which are offered as elective courses. Consequently, student teachers of physical education are exposed to a regular diet of how to deconstruct the body and examine its parts. The student teachers develop and extend their understanding of how to improve the physical fitness and training methods of an athlete's body within a framework that emphasizes an effective and efficient body.

Dewar (1987), Hargreaves (1986) and Kirk (1993) have pointed out that students view the biological scientific knowledge as unproblematic. This could be a reflection of the fact that the scientific knowledge is compulsory in their university courses. Therefore the student teachers of physical education could develop a narrow viewpoint that the body is an object to be schooled using the compulsory scientific knowledge they acquired while at university. Not only do the student teachers develop a view that the body is an object to be schooled, they are not in a position to effectively question socially constructed stereotypes of acceptable male and female deportment. Male bodies, for example, are viewed as larger and stronger than female bodies. The male body is more predisposed to display the characteristics of aggressiveness and competitiveness that are deemed necessary for success in most sports (Dewar, 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Kirk, 1992). The socially constructed perception of the female body is that it is passive and non-competitive (Connell, 1983).

Bordo (1995), MacKinnon (1987), Mulvey (1989) and Young (1979, 1980) have suggested that women have constructed a sense of themselves under the gaze of other people and so the females feel that they are more visible for examination. In physical education classes, females may perceive that there is more at stake than just participating

in a physical activity; it could be that they are conscious that there is a particular way that females should participate to maintain their femininity.

Conversations with Margaret, Maureen, Vera and Ailsa suggested that they learned to school their bodies to fit in with some of the dominant ways that society dictates females should behave and present their bodies. Ailsa commented that she learned to be less competitive in her physical education class. This was due in part to her peers informing her that she should be less competitive when participating in team game situations. Ailsa's peers informed her that they did not consider it appropriate for them to be subjected to her competitive nature. The end result was that Ailsa became less competitive so that she could fit in with the students in her class. In accordance with J. A. Hargreaves (1985), Hargreaves (1986), Dewar (1990) and Kirk (1993), Ailsa's peers informed her that an outward display of competitive behavior was not appropriate for a female. Ailsa internalized the knowledge of what was appropriate game behavior. The power of the knowledge was evident in the manner in which Ailsa perceived that it was more important to be less competitive and to fit in with her peers than to run the risk of being isolated from them. Therefore Ailsa learned to modify her own behavior to ensure that she continued to receive approval from her peers.

In the discipline of physical education Ailsa felt that she saw examples of sexism. Her explanation of sexism was the existence of gender stereotypes and people acting on those stereotypes. The stereotype that Ailsa believed to be true was that males were larger, stronger, and consequently their performances were superior to those of females. During our conversations she informed me that her performance was occasionally superior

to that of a boy in her coeducational class. Yet she would not allow that example to contradict her own perception that males were superior performers. Ailsa's physical education teachers did not assist her in examining the construction of such stereotypes. Many teachers of physical education operate from biological/scientific knowledge, which purports that it is natural for males to be larger and stronger than females (Dewar, 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Kirk, 1992).

If physical education is operating from a scientific discourse in the training of physical education teachers, teacher education programs need to encourage student teachers to reflect on how stereotypes are constructed. The student teachers could be encouraged to consider the impact of the stereotypes in a physical education environment and to consider ways in which stereotypes could be dismantled. As a result of close examination of stereotypes and their impact in physical education, future teachers would be in a better position to encourage pupils to reflect on their own beliefs in those stereotypes.

Future research could investigate the influence that peers have over competitive behavior within a range of physical education classes. The other side of this coin could be an investigation of how competitive behavior influences the less competitive pupils in the class. Research could also examine how stereotypes are constructed and maintained in physical education. The research could examine how stereotypes impact students in physical education programs.

Maureen's story illustrated that although it was appropriate for a female to follow a weight training program she had to exercise great care in not developing too much

muscle as she thought this would intimidate men. Maureen had internalized what it meant to her to have a feminine body in the 1990's, which was to have a body that received the approval of the male gaze. As a result, she had to be careful about how she schooled her body. Knowledge about what was an appropriate feminine body had informed Maureen not to overstep the boundaries and challenge the socially acceptable stereotypes of femininity.

Bordo (1995) and Kirk (1993) highlight how a female body builder who had overstepped the boundaries of muscled femininity was placed last in a female body building competition. The judges of the competition were not prepared to approve a female body that was heavily muscled as fitting within the acceptable "feminine" image. Haber (1996) observed that female body builders were allowed to operate in society provided they received the gaze of approval from men.

Maureen made the choice to improve the appearance of her body. The choices she made were from a socially constructed understanding about what was considered an acceptable female body in the 1990's, a toned body without the muscle bulk. On the one hand, Maureen was exercising control over the shape of her body. On the other hand, her actions were shaped by her need to receive approval from her peers and society in general. It is very difficult to know whether Maureen made her decision about how to shape her body through power that repressed some of the choices she could have had or power that constituted her freedom of choice.

Teacher education programs could incorporate courses that encourage students to examine the social beliefs and values underpinning various body types. Through this

examination the students could investigate the origins of such beliefs and values and the structures that help to perpetuate the beliefs and values associated with body types. As a result of the examination and reflection process, the students could examine why people exercise their bodies. This process could encourage student teachers of physical education to look beyond the mechanical aspects of how to school the body.

If student teachers of physical education were encouraged to reflect on the social influences of exercising the body, they would be in a better position to deliver programs that encourage students to question the influences that inform their choices and behaviors. The pupils could be encouraged to examine the influence of the media and society on their decisions about the type of active lifestyle they would like to develop and maintain.

Future research could be conducted on how females perceive the influence of society on how they school their bodies. The study could try to investigate the main determining factors that impact females in their decision-making process. Future research could also investigate how males are influenced by society on how to school their bodies. Research could be conducted on how males perceive and experience their physical education classes. Studies could try to discover what discourses helped to shape their perceptions of their bodies and what discourses they drew on to make sense of their experiences in physical education.

## **Conclusion**

This study gave me the opportunity to examine how four women experienced their junior and senior high school physical education. It would appear from their

conversations with me that their perceptions of their own physical performances and how they compared to their peers were very influential in the way they constructed a sense of themselves. Physical education provided the space and the practices to school the body to perform in particular ways. The emphasis was on performance and unfortunately if the participants did not see their performance matching up to the majority in the class their confidence to perform was eroded.

The solutions to the problems the participants encountered are not easily identifiable. The physical education discipline could design programs that do not make physical performance the main focus of formal assessment. The assessable elements could be cooperation, problem-solving skills, questioning and examination skills and students' designing physical activities that meet the needs of the group. For instance, students could examine the construction of stereotypes and how they influence their lives. Students could be encouraged to examine how rules of games have been constructed and how they could be modified to accommodate students' differences in playing ability, and physical characteristics that should be constructively taken into account in a classroom situation. The students could be encouraged to develop a sense that they have some input into their physical education program.

To continue with the modification of the formalization of physical education, the multi-disciplinary approach to educating students could be developed. Inter-disciplinary programs could develop courses that help students to break down the view that certain knowledge is related to one particular discipline. If the boundaries between disciplines are broken down and the pupil experiences difficulty in understanding a concept, possibly

another discipline can provide the student with the necessary understanding. For interdisciplinary programs to operate successfully, a very well-coordinated course must be designed by the teachers who are involved in the delivery of the curriculum.

If physical education is involved in inter-disciplinary programs, the pupils and teachers could be encouraged to consider larger questions and issues related to how the body is schooled. If physical education departments cannot find ways of developing interdisciplinary courses, they could develop in-house programs that examine the influences and pressures that are on students to school their bodies in particular styles.

I have offered a few suggestions on how to modify physical education programs in light of the participants' experiences. However, this is not to imply that there are easy answers to the complex issues and questions raised by participants. We can only hope that insight and vision can lead to informed practices in physical education.



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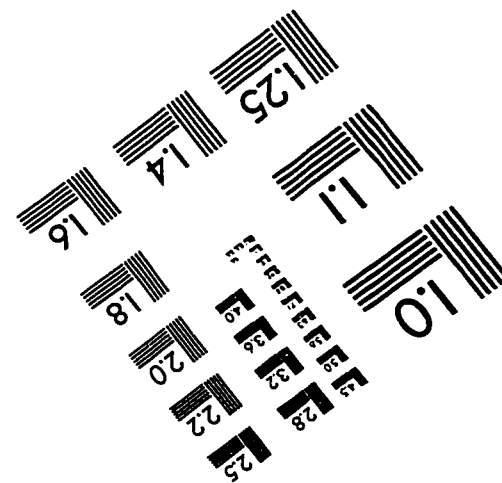
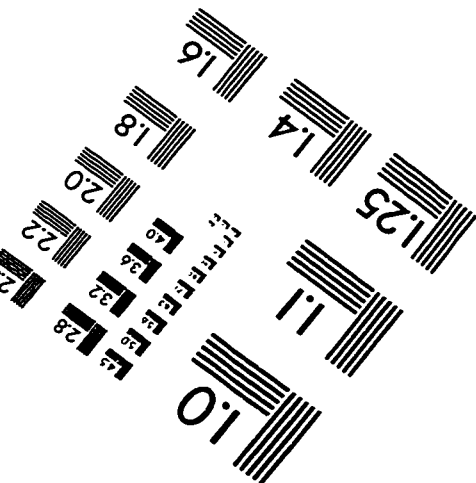
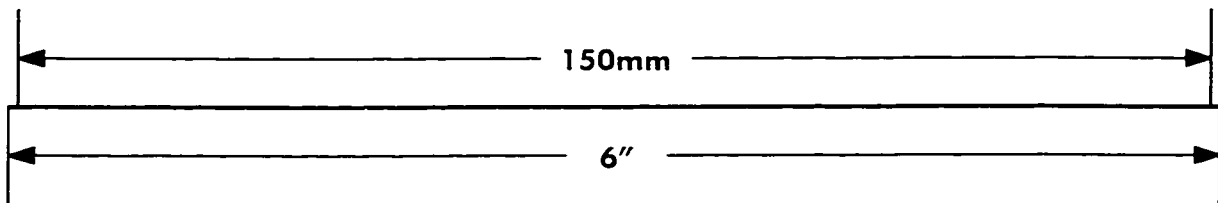
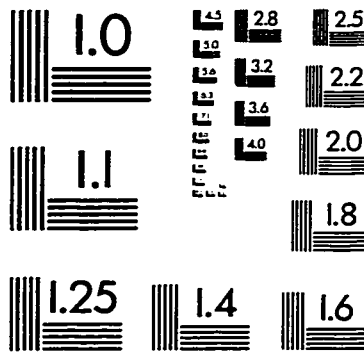
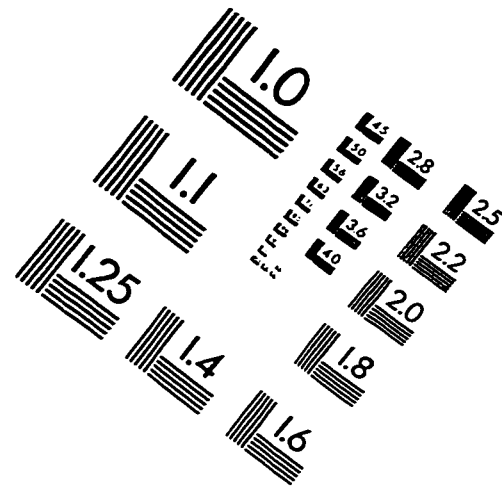
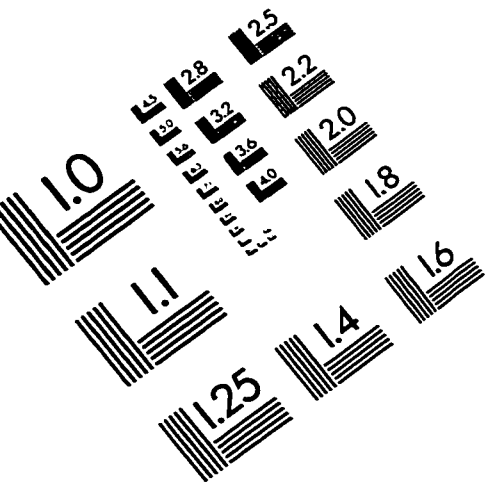
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