

A Narrative Exploration of Girls' Experiences in Elective Physical Education:
Why do they Continue?

by

Jennifer B. Gruno
BEd., University of Victoria, 2006

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ABSTRACT

Physical inactivity is a serious public health concern in Canada, especially among the country's youth. Adolescent girls, in particular, suffer many life-long consequences due to inactivity. Physical Education (PE) can offer a solution. However, the vast majority of girls discontinue enrollment in PE as soon as the mandatory credits are met. Tailored PE courses designed to meet the needs and interests of girls may motivate girls to continue participating in PE. This narrative inquiry explored three girls' stories of their past experiences in elementary, middle, and high school PE, as well as their current experiences in a tailored elective PE course entitled Girls Actively Living (GAL). The goals of this study were to explore how the girls' experiences with the course content, learning environment, and assessment in GAL affected their perceptions of physical education. Additionally, it was of interest how their experiences outside of PE influenced their desire to continue in elective PE and how their experiences in GAL affected their perceptions of physical activity. Findings emphasized the importance of (a) variety and cooperation within PE course content, (b) a fun and welcoming PE learning environment, (c) fair and private assessment, and (d) feelings of confidence, social safety, and competence for girls in PE.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mom. Her unconditional love and support has helped me to realize this, as well as all other goals in my life.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Physical inactivity is a serious public health concern in Canada since inactivity contributes to the population burden of chronic disease, disability, and premature death (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). Despite the fact that the physical (e.g. reduced cardiovascular disease and obesity) and psychological (e.g. increased self-esteem and body image) benefits of physical activity (PA) are well known, many Canadian youth are not reaping these benefits of regular PA. Overweight and obesity levels have increased substantially in Canada over the past 25 years. In the late 1970s, 12% of 2- to 17-year-olds were overweight and 3% were obese—a combined overweight/obesity rate of 15% (Shields, 2006). By the time the Canadian Health Measures Survey was completed in 2009-2011, close to one third (31.5%) of 5- to 17-year-olds, an estimated 1.6 million, were classified as overweight (19.8%) or obese (11.7%) (Roberts, Karen, Shields, de Groh, Aziz, & Gilbert, 2012). Teens are much less active than younger children, and girls are less active than boys. PA significantly decreases with each increasing age group and these gender differences appear at every age (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2011). A significant decline in PA among girls can be seen as early as the age of 12 (Knowles, Niven, Fawkner, & Henretty, 2009), and often even younger. The Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey in Canada showed that only 27% of female youth (grades 6-10) reported that they were physically active at least 60 minutes a day (Boyce, 2004).

This dramatic decline in adolescent girls' PA is an important public health issue. There is evidence that, if females do not have a history of involvement in physical activity during adolescence, they are significantly less likely to be physically active as adults (Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills, & Järvelin, 2003). The Canadian Physical Activity Monitor reports that women

are less likely to be at least moderately active than men (CFLRI, 2008). As it is more likely that a physically active adolescent female will become an active woman, this suggests that PA interventions targeting adolescent girls are needed.

School based physical education (PE) classes are well situated to help adolescent girls realize the benefits of PA as they are available to the majority of youth, are free (in most situations), and provide a structured context for PA participation. PE classes are able to reach large numbers of youth with more intensive programs (five days a week) than would be possible via programs run from health clinics, community centers, or after- school programs. Furthermore, PE reaches girls who might not be motivated or able to attend programs outside of school hours. Research has found that time constraint is one of the top reasons girls have for not participating in PA (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex, 2003b). As PE fits within the school day it does not conflict with other social events, homework, after-school jobs, or family commitments.

The aim of the British Columbia (BC) PE curriculum “is to enable all students to develop knowledge, movement skills, and positive attitudes and behaviors that contribute to a healthy, active lifestyle” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008). Given this aim, it seems appropriate that PE would be an avenue for girls to learn the long term benefits of PA. However, the majority of adolescent girls have an aversion to PE in high school. This distaste for PE often starts as early as middle school (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008) and is evidenced by the fact that only 15% of girls in British Columbia elect to take PE in grades 11 and 12 once it is no longer mandatory (N. Poeschek, personal communication, July 14th, 2012).

Several researchers have focused on identifying the reasons why girls become disengaged in PE and later drop out after the required credits have been met. This research suggests that the

offerings within the majority of middle-school and high-school PE programs are not meaningful to girls. Considering that many girls feel a lack of competence, are not interested in the content offered, and struggle with self-identity and the learning environment in PE class, it is not surprising that they do not want to continue enrolling. Girls who felt that their needs and interests were not met in PE have been provided a voice through this research (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Davison, Schmalz, & Downs, 2010; Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin, 2002; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, et al., 2003b; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; van Daalen, 2005).

Despite the fact that many PE programs are failing to engage most adolescent girls, there has been research on identifying promising PE practices that have met the needs and interests of girls in PE. Case studies of individual programs and school wide interventions with PE components have identified that girls will remain engaged and even continue to enroll in elective PE when: PE focuses on lifetime activities; builds competence; provides choice; allows for gender separation; has a positive learning environment; includes social and family support; and community links. Through research, it has been demonstrated that an emphasis on positive and enjoyable experiences can motivate adolescent girls to change their attitudes or participation in PE (Dudley, Okely, Pearson, & Peat, 2010; Fairclough & Stratton, 2005; Gibbons, 2009; Jamner, Spruijt-Metz, Bassin, & Cooper, 2004; Jones, Hoelscher, Kelder, Hergenroeder, & Sharma, 2008; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, & Rex, 2003a; Pate et al., 2005; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010; Webber et al., 2008). Understanding the experiences of young women in PE, such as what factors encourage them to choose to continue in elective PE, may provide some solution to declining activity levels.

Even though a considerable amount of research has been conducted on exploring the reasons why girls are disengaged in PE and drop out, and the promising practices that keep girls engaged in PE, limited research has taken an in-depth look into the experiences of girls who are engaged in PE and decide to continue enrolling in elective PE. Accordingly, there is a need to provide the girls who do continue in elective PE a voice so that their experiences can be understood and their reasons for continuing, when the vast majority of girls do not, can be identified. This study aimed to gain an understanding of girls' experiences who choose to continue enrolling in elective PE. Understanding these experiences will help build knowledge about the determinants of decisions to continue in PE and inform teachers about engaging PE program design.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

It is evident that carefully designed PE programs can meet the needs of young women and can encourage them to continue in elective PE. Hearing the experiences of girls directly allowed for a greater understanding of how their experiences regarding the three parts of the teaching process: course content; learning environment; and assessment affected their participation and continuation in PE. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of girls who continue to enroll in a tailored senior elective physical education course. Insight was gained into their past and current experiences in PE and their reasons for continued enrollment.

1.2 Research Questions

Five research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How did the girls' experiences with the course content in the tailored PE course affect their perceptions of physical education?

2. How did the girls' experiences with the learning environment in the PE course affect their perceptions of physical education?
3. How did the girls' experiences with assessment in the course affect their perceptions of physical education?
4. How did their experiences outside of physical education influence their desire to continue in elective PE?
5. How did the girls' experiences in the tailored elective physical education course affect their perceptions of physical activity?

1.3 Assumptions

1. The participants responded truthfully during the interviews.
2. Participants telling their stories were able to authentically recall their PE experiences.
3. Participants were able to verbally express and reflect on their personal experiences.
4. The researcher's past experiences became part of the research process.

1.4 Limitations

1. A limitation of the narrative methodology is it only captures the experiences of the individuals involved; it cannot be generalized to the experience of all adolescent girls in PE.
2. The themes presented are only applicable to the experiences in this tailored PE course in this mid-sized rural school.
3. The focus of the study was limited due to the researcher's experiences and resources.

1.5 Delimitations

1. Girls between the ages of 16-18 in one tailored PE 10-12 course.

2. This study targeted girls who were enrolled in the tailored PE course for a second or third time and were in grade 11 or 12.

1.6 Operational Definitions

Adolescent girl: Adolescence refers to the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. It is a unique stage of development characterized by many physiological, cognitive, psychosocial, and sexual changes. For this study, middle/late adolescence (15-18 years) was examined. This period of time is characterized by growth in emotional autonomy, importance of peer acceptance, and the development of a strong personal identity (Stang & Story, 2005). This study included adolescent girls only.

Physical education (PE): a school subject designed to help youth develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for participating in active, healthy living (Fishburne & Hickson, 2005).

Physical activity (PA): a movement of the body that expends energy; such as participation in sports, dance, and exercise. Physical activity is used in physical education programs as a medium for teaching curriculum content and for providing fun opportunities through which to practice and improve on learned skills (Fishburne & Hickson, 2005).

Course content: the subject matter and class activities the students participate in during Physical Education.

Learning environment: is comprised of four factors: the physical setting; relationships (teacher-student and student-student); structures and expectations; and language and communication.

Assessment: the systematic process of gathering information about student learning, what they know, are able to do, and are trying to do (BC Ministry of Health, n.d.).

Tailored: Any combination of strategies and information intended to reach a specific audience, based on characteristics that are unique to that audience, related to the outcome of interest and derived from an individual assessment (Kreuter, Strecher, & Glassman, 1999, p. 277)

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review has been divided into two main sections. Section one examines the reasons why female students dislike PE. The second section reviews the promising practices of PE programs and school-wide interventions with a PE component that have been designed by teachers and researchers to better meet the needs of female students. The chapter concludes with future areas of research.

2.1 Underlying Reasons for Girls' Dissatisfaction in PE

As mentioned previously, PA tends to decline as youth progress through adolescence with a widening gender gap. To prevent this decline in PA among adolescent girls, it is essential to identify barriers correlated with PA that are amenable to change and can be addressed within PE. It is not enough to simply promote PE without understanding how those girls expected to participate experience it. A disconnect occurs between what many girls value in PA and what they experience in some PE programs. Not surprisingly, some young women do not associate their PA preferences with those included in their PE courses (Gibbons, 2009).

Studies employing questionnaires (Davison, Schmalz, & Downs, 2010; Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin, 2002; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, et al., 2003b), individual interviews and focus groups (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; van Daalen, 2005) have concentrated on revealing the reasons behind girls' aversion to PE. Within this literature, the reasons for girls dissatisfaction in PE fell within four broad and interrelated themes: girls feel a lack of competence in typical PE programs; a focus on team sports and competition; struggles with self-identity (the perception that PA is not feminine); and a negative learning environment. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

2.1.1 Girls feel a lack of competence in typical PE programs. A lack of perceived competence plays a leading role in explaining girls' disinclination for PE and their attrition in elective PE courses. Perceived competence refers to an individual's beliefs about how capable she is in various achievement domains, in this case, the physical domain (Horn, 2004). Too often young women do not feel physically competent because they lack the fundamental skills needed to participate in an array of PA opportunities (Trew, Scully, Kremer, & Ogle, 1999). The studies that follow focused on revealing girls' perceptions of low physical competence in PE.

Davison, Schmalz, & Downs (2010) developed, validated and implemented the Girls' Disinclination for Physical Activity Scale (G-DAS) along with an objective measure of PA in a longitudinal sample of adolescent girls aged 13 and 15. The girls completed the G-DAS, the Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale, and wore an accelerometer for 7 days. Davison et al. (2010) found that lack of perceived competence was the most common reason girls reported for disliking PA and a major determinate of disengagement in PA across ages 13-15. These ages correspond to grades 9 and 10, the last two years that PE is mandatory in British Columbia. It follows that, if girls do not feel physically competent in required PE, it is very unlikely that they would choose to enroll once it becomes an elective course.

van Daalen (2005) employed a pilot study to explore why girls' enrollment in PE dwindles once compulsory credits are achieved. Her purpose in the feminist qualitative inquiry was to glean meaning from the narratives of young woman. The participants in her study reported experiencing fun in PE when they were good at the activity or sport. However, most of the time participants felt they were not skilled enough at the activities offered in their PE programs. Many of the girls stated that they resented being evaluated on strength, skill and coordination. Interestingly, the turning point for each of the participants in PE (when they

decided to no longer enroll) was after the Canada Fitness Testing, when fun and enjoyment of PA was replaced with a need to prove oneself. Many of the girls reported really enjoying PA when they were younger, but as soon as PA became hinged on athletic ability, an overwhelming feeling and experience of not being good enough replaced their feelings of freedom.

Gibbons and Humbert (2008) used focus groups, individual interviews, and questionnaires to collect data on the experiences of female students in co-educational, middle-school, PE classes. Their participants identified the notion of competence by emphasizing perceived inequity between different students. The girls felt frustrated when compared to classmates who were more skilled, students for example that “played on the basketball team and had way more practice than what [they] got in PE” (p. 177). These participants commented specifically on the lack of time between being introduced to a new skill and subsequently being evaluated on that same skill. The public nature of the PE environment also contributed to the girls’ poor comfort level. Regardless of the physical activity, the girls undoubtedly wanted to develop their skills and felt inadequate and uncomfortable when they were compared to more skilled classmates.

Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin (2002) provided heads of physical education (HoPE) questionnaires that focused on the provision of lifetime activities in PE. They found that the schools in their study placed significant emphasis on team games, often at the expense of lifetime activities. They argued that traditional, skill-based teaching modes were more likely to produce a cycle of perceived incompetence. This perceived incompetence stopped girls from choosing to take part in that activity in school, outside of school and after leaving school.

2.1.2 A focus on team sports and competition. In the 2008 Physical Activity Monitor, it was stated that 65% of adult women reported observing or trying an activity was very helpful

in making them more active (CFLRI, 2008). Therefore, it seems logical that the more activities shown to young women during PE, the more chance they have of becoming physically active outside of school. There have been strong recommendations that PE programs should focus on the promotion of lifetime PA in order to enhance and maintain children's health later in life. However, typical PE programs tend to focus on competitive team sports. Lifetime activities such as dance, yoga, aerobics, tennis etc. only occur occasionally or are ignored altogether (Fairclough et al., 2002). Less than 20% of adult women continue to play games and sports after leaving high school (CFLRI, 2009) yet the majority of activities in PE curricula are team-games. It is unlikely that a traditional games-based curriculum will attract many young women into an active lifestyle.

Fairclough et al. (2002) found the PE programs in their study offered 231 team games compared to 154 lifetime activities. This trend was reflected much more by male PE programs (120 team games versus 60 lifetime activities), than female PE programs (111 versus 94). The authors argued that many students, who may not be attracted to or skilled in team sports, might be discouraged from taking part in extra-curricular PA. When the curriculum is predominantly team game-biased it merely serves to reinforce the traditional stereotypes of girls' and boys' activities.

Gibbons and Humbert (2008) found that the majority of middle school girls in their study were dissatisfied with the offerings in PE. The girls disliked the predominance of team sports, frequently stating that such activities had little relevance to their current or future lifestyles.

Slater and Tiggemann (2010) aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons that adolescent girls give for ceasing participation in sports and other physical activities and for why they do not participate as much as boys. They conducted six focus groups with adolescent girls

aged 13 to 15 years old. The girls identified that sports in elementary school were less competitive in nature and that they found this more enjoyable. Competitive team sports are predominantly offered in middle and high school PE, and competition was one of the key factors associated with girls' decision to drop PE in the van Daalen (2005) study. According to van Daalen, some of the participants experienced competition during PE class as a very real threat to their bonds of friendship.

2.1.3 Struggles with self-identity (the perception that PA is not feminine).

Adolescence is a time of physical, social, and emotional changes and transitions. Mid to late adolescence, in particular, is important for setting the stage for continued development through the life span as girls begin to make choices and engage in a variety of activities that are influential to the rest of their lives (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). However, during mid to late adolescence, contradictory standards and feedback from others has the potential to decrease global self-worth because adolescent girls are not able to meet the expectations of everyone (Harter, 1999). Additionally, this is a period of time when girls experience pressure to conform to the ideal of "emphasized femininity" (Connell, 1987).

Cockburn and Clarke (2002) conducted a qualitative study of six girls' (aged 13-14) experiences and motivations in PE. In their examination they found that the young women struggled in PE because PA countered the feminine identity created for them by society, particularly in male dominated activities. The findings in other qualitative studies, which focused on revealing the barriers girls experience in PE exposed similar "feminine deficits" (Garret, 2004; Fisette, 2012; van Daalen, 2005).

Slater and Tiggemann (2010) found that girls, in all of their focus groups, discussed the perception that it is not 'cool' or feminine for girls to play sport. In general, there was a high

level of agreement that girls playing sports may be viewed in a negative light by some of their peers, particularly other girls. While the girls were quite clear that playing sports might not be considered 'cool' for girls, they also expressed the opinion that sport was an important aspect for boys' identities, and may be particularly important for a boy's sense of masculinity. Another related issue, which emerged under this broader theme, was that girls might not participate in sports and other physical activities because of a fear of building up too many muscles, which may be perceived as masculine in appearance.

van Daalen (2005) also identified that tied to the girls' feminine identities were issues with poor body image in PE. These issues included feeling insecure in PE clothing, changing in front of other girls, and not enough time to transform themselves after PE class.

2.1.4 A negative learning environment. Slater and Tiggemann (2010) found that girls were subject to teasing and conflict from the boys in co-educational PE settings. Many of the girls in their study talked about the difficulties of 'getting a shot' when playing with the boys, and they raised issues about the boys treating them differently because of their gender. Similarly, Gibbons and Humbert (2008) found that girls in their study described fairly frequent occurrences of harassment and intimidation by their male classmates. Interestingly, although girls mentioned how they did not like the behaviour of the boys, few said they wanted to be in separate PE classes. The response was more often that the girls wanted to "show the boys" that they could participate as well as them (p. 180). However, they perceived that they were rarely able to do so as the course content and learning environment favoured the boys.

Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, Tharp, & Rex (2003b) conducted a cohort study with 201 high school girls recruited to participate in an evaluation study of a school-based obesity prevention PE program. After an 8-month period they found that a lack of support from teachers

and peers was one of the strongest and most consistent factors in a decrease in PA. Not only was it found that teachers lacked support for the girls in their classes, but often the teachers' negative attitudes and behaviours functioned as great deterrents for girls in PE. Similarly, in van Daalen (2005), many girls felt that their teachers expressed favouritism toward the boys. Additionally, teachers were found to make assessment a public event, which further damaged the girls' already fragile self-esteem.

Flintoff and Scraton's (2001) qualitative study aimed to explore young women's perceptions of and attitudes towards involvement in PA and PE. They drew on group and individual interviews with 21 15-year-old young women to explore the nature, purpose and experiences of their PA involvement, both in and out of school. The girls in their study said that some PE teachers "were sarcastic about their skill level, or held low expectations of them, or just did not seem to care" (p. 12). PE teachers, although they recognized gender differences and the often negative influence on girls from boys in their lessons, rarely did anything to challenge the boys' behaviours. Similarly, Gibbons and Humbert (2008) found that there was a strong sentiment among their participants that their teachers attended more closely to the needs and interests of their male classmates. The girls in this study also noted that the negative behaviour of the boys would sometimes prevent the teachers from offering a wider range of physical activities.

Girls are clearly disengaged in typical PE classes for a number of reasons. However, some researchers and PE teachers have identified these reasons and have attempted to address these issues by designing PE programs and interventions specifically purposed to meet the needs and interests of adolescent girls. The features of these promising practices are discussed in the next section.

2.2 Promising Practices: Meeting the Needs and Interests of Girls in PE

Research on promising practices in PE supports the notions that if the needs and interests of young women are incorporated into PE programs, they will willingly participate, and continue to enroll. Research in Canada (Gibbons, 2009; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010) and elsewhere (Dudley, Okely, Pearson, & Peat, 2010; Fairclough & Stratton, 2005; Jamner, Spruijt-Metz, Bassin, & Cooper, 2004; Jones, Hoelscher, Kelder, Hergenroeder, & Sharma, 2008; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, & Rex, 2003a; Pate et al., 2005; Webber et al., 2008) have identified several key features that teenage girls look for in their PE courses. These studies highlight successful PE programs and interventions, which met the needs and interests of girls, increased PA in existing PE classes and, in some cases, increased enrolment in elective courses. The studies show that there are a number of factors which feature in young women's enjoyment of PE. These factors are grouped into eight themes and discussed in the following sections.

2.2.1 A focus on lifetime physical activity. In order to promote the PE goal of preparing students for lifetime participation in PA, physical educators must recognize which activities have the greatest carry-over value into adult life. PE teachers need to aim to provide more opportunities for all students to experience lifetime activities, both within and outside curriculum time.

Fairclough et al. (2002) define lifetime activities as those that may readily be carried over into adulthood because they generally can be pursued individually or with others, require little structure or organization and minimal equipment. Such activities include cycling, jogging, dance, tennis, etc. The authors state “in comparison to team games, lifetime activities pursued during childhood are more likely to impact on adult physical activity levels” (p. 71).

Gibbons (2009) studied 32 senior PE courses from 22 school districts in British Columbia that had successfully maintained high enrolments of female students. Through analysis of course outlines, interviews with teachers, and student questionnaires, she found that a “Focus on Lifetime Physical Activities,” was the most frequently mentioned theme in all three data sources. The most frequently listed physical activities in course outlines included yoga, aerobics, Pilates, boxercise, strength training, self-defense, and walking (Gibbons, 2009).

Dudley, Okely, Pearson, & Peat (2010) examined the feasibility, acceptability, and potential efficacy of a school-based PA program delivered during school sport time among adolescent girls from low income, linguistically diverse backgrounds in New South Wales, Australia. They used a 3-month pilot randomized control trial (RCT) design with 38 adolescent girls and randomised the girls into intervention (n=17) and control groups (n=21). The intervention program aimed to increase PA by improving enjoyment, physical self-perception and perceived competence. The intervention consisted of enjoyable, challenging, and new activities such as yoga, Pilates, and dance sessions run in a classroom using videos, an introductory tennis-coaching course, and aquatic games offered at a local swimming pool. These were included as a result of activities requested by girls in focus groups during the formative research stage. Despite the fact that these activities were less vigorous than the ones participated in by the control group (e.g. touch football, ball games and basketball), the level of enjoyment of PA increased among intervention group girls compared with their control group peers and there was a smaller decline in PA during school sport in the intervention group.

Jamner, Spruijt-Metz, Bassin, & Cooper (2004) evaluated the effect of a school-based intervention, Project FAB, designed to increase PA among sedentary adolescent females. The girls were assigned to a control (n=22) or intervention (n=25) group based on school attended.

Students at the intervention school enrolled in a special PE class. The types of activities offered in the special PE class were also selected based on focus groups' input, and included aerobic dance, basketball, swimming, and Tae Bo. After four months, the intervention group reported engaging in significantly more lifestyle activity as compared with the control group. This finding suggested that the effect of the PE intervention could be generalized outside the PE setting with the encouraging possibility that the program's effects could endure after the end of the intervention.

2.2.2 Opportunities and support to build competence. Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, & Rex (2003a) assessed the feasibility of New Moves, a multi-component, girls-only, high-school PE class, for obesity prevention among adolescent girls. They collected data at baseline, post-intervention, and at 8-month follow-up to assess program impact on PA, self-perceptions, and body mass index (BMI) among 89 girls in the intervention and 112 girls in the control conditions. They found that the adolescent girls who felt better about themselves and their athletic competence were more likely to be active and continue to enroll in PE courses. Similarly, Gibbons & Humbert (2008) discussed how attention to adequate practice time, teaching strategies that allowed for sound progressions, and interesting practice tasks increased the likelihood of skill improvement, and ultimately more enjoyment.

Fairclough and Stratton (2005) aimed to increase cardio respiratory health-enhancing PA levels during girls' gymnastics lessons by manipulating the lesson contexts and teacher behaviours without compromising other planned lesson objectives. Their study involved two classes of 30–32 girls aged 11–12 years from one co-educational high school in Merseyside, England. Classes were randomly assigned to control and intervention conditions. The teacher of the intervention class included enhanced PA levels as an additional planned lesson objective,

alongside existing objectives from a gymnastics unit of work. The intervention PE lessons provided significantly greater opportunities for skill practice than the control lessons and devoted less time to management, which could be a static lesson context. Such episodes of free skill practice allowed the students to work independently of the teacher, and gave the option for repeated practice of skills and sequences. The authors argued that augmented practice occasions may effectively promote motor skill learning and students with superior motor skills are likely to achieve greater PA engagement during lessons. Likewise, Flintoff and Scraton (2001) found enjoyment of feeling skillful, whether through the process of working to gain a formal qualification, or simply acquiring the moves of an aerobics class, was a valued part of PE for girls.

Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) conducted a qualitative case study that used Self-Determination Theory as a framework to explore female students' motivation towards PA in one elective PE 10-12 course tailored to meet their needs and interests. They found that providing a class environment that offered an optimal level of challenge supported the girls' need for competence. The participants in the case study described feelings of competence because the class was at the right level of difficulty. The girls expressed how they felt more confident in their abilities because there was less pressure to be the best and more focus on overall effort and improvement. It was shown that a sense of competence could also be created through assessment. Since grades were not based solely on skill testing or skill comparison between classmates, but rather on individual effort and participation, this motivated the girls to put in greater effort.

Findings from these studies support the need to promote early PA-based skill acquisition among girls as a method to foster perceived competence and enjoyment of PA. Skill attainment

and perceived physical competence can be promoted through early positive experiences with a range of physical activities.

2.2.3 Having a say: choice and student involvement in course development. The major intent of PE is to promote lifelong PA behaviors; therefore, incorporating choice and student input seems essential to the design of a successful PE course. Students feel that when they have more choice, PE becomes more fun, which is motivating (Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). This can mean choice in activities offered as well as choice in what clothing they wear during PE (Dudley et al., 2010). Additionally, affording students the opportunity for input into course development contributes to greater meaning and sense of ownership for their learning (Gibbons, 2009).

Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) found that through use of a course content survey that utilized student input, participants felt in control over their PE experiences. The participants expressed how they enjoyed being able to choose their activities because it meant that they were able to do the activities they liked. Participating in these activities in turn motivated them because it made the class more enjoyable.

Dudley et al. (2010) argued that ownership and decision making pertaining to PE needs should be partly transferred from the teachers involved in delivering the programs to the students the programs serve. Allowing the intervention participants to be actively involved in the decisions made about their PE program contributed to the success of the school sport program.

2.2.4 Being physically active during PE. The Webber, Catellier, Lytle, Murray, Pratt, Young, Elder, et al. (2008) study involved middle school girls in 36 schools in six geographically diverse areas of the United States in the Trial of Activity for Adolescent Girls (TAAG) intervention. Their 2-year intervention targeted schools, community agencies, and girls to

increase opportunities, support, and incentives for increased PA. The intervention PE classes promoted moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) for at least 50% of class time.

Following the study, the girls in intervention schools were modestly more physically active than girls in control schools (about 1.6 minutes of daily MVPA or 80 kcal per week).

Pate, Ward, Saunders, Felton, Dishman, & Dowda (2005) designed a comprehensive PA intervention, Lifestyle Education for Activity Program (LEAP), to change the instructional program and the school environment to increase support for PA among girls. They used a group-randomized controlled field trial conducted at 24 high schools. Participants were a school-based sample of 2744 girls in eighth and ninth grade. One of the goals of LEAP PE was to involve girls in MVPA during 50% or more of PE class time and as a result girls in the intervention schools reported higher levels of PA during PE classes than girls in the control schools did.

Fairclough and Stratton (2005) aimed in their intervention to enhance PA levels as an additional lesson objective, alongside existing objectives for a unit of gymnastics. They found that the intervention group participated in MVPA 11.9% more in the lesson time than the control group. These levels were achieved without negatively impacting the girls' intrinsic motivation, perceived competence or the teacher's lesson objectives. This is significant as these psychological constructs are strongly related to positive attitudes and persistence in PA.

2.2.5 Gender separation opportunities. Some of the above mentioned PE programs and interventions included girls-only classes. It was discovered that having girls-only classes was not necessary for meeting the needs and interests of girls in PE, but young women often viewed it very positively. The implementation of co-educational PE classes appears to have contributed to greater gender equity and has advantages for many adolescents; however, co-ed PE classes can present a myriad of barriers for girls, particularly those with concerns about their

appearance and skill levels in PE. A girls-only PE option makes it more feasible for girls to discuss some of the barriers they face in being physically active, and to feel comfortable engaging in different activities. Flintoff and Scraton (2001) argued that part of this could be due to the fact that male games played in schools have much greater cultural status and value and therefore dominate co-educational PE. Girls in their study discussed the importance of girls-only PE, at least for some activities, to avoid scrutiny from the boys. Likewise, Slater and Tiggmann (2010) stated “single-sex physical education lessons may...be beneficial by providing a comfortable environment for girls to acquire the necessary skills and abilities to then feel confident in other sporting contexts” (p. 626). Many participants in the Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) study stated that having a girls-only class allowed them to feel comfortable and less self-conscious when participating in PA. Some participants felt that the female only environment was motivating and that they could participate without fear of being judged.

2.2.6 A positive and respectful class environment. Providing a variety of lifetime activities in PE and opportunities to build physical competence are of paramount importance. However, the nature of the environment created by the teacher has as much (if not more) impact on girls’ enjoyment in PE. Flintoff and Scraton (2001) suggested that “teachers who can provide safe and supportive environments, who recognize the often different aspirations and motivations amongst their pupils, and who listen to their pupils, are more likely to be successful than those who subscribe to hierarchical, discipline-based relationships and traditional curricula and pedagogies” (p. 17). Teachers who listened to the young women, who took them seriously, and who could relate to them and their lifestyles were viewed positively by the girls in their study. Participants in the Gibbons (2009) study emphasized the importance of a positive and respectful learning environment in their PE classes. When asked what the young women valued in their PE

class, they frequently mentioned feeling safe and included. The most frequent comment from both students and teachers about the learning environment focused on the enjoyment of being with classmates with similar interests and skill level.

It was mentioned in two studies that the teacher added to the positive learning environment by acting as a facilitator and a role model for PA by participating in the activities with the girls (Dudley et al., 2010; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) found that students responded well to their teacher's participation and discussed how having her as an active role model made the participants less afraid to try a new activity and motivated them to try harder. In the van Daalen (2005) study, girls preferred same-sex teachers as they sought to make PE safe and comfortable.

2.2.7 Social and family support. Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) found that opportunities to work in groups with their friends motivated the girls to be active and being with their friends made the class more enjoyable. Group work and being with friends in PE were important facilitators to girls' PA participation in the LEAP intervention (Felton et al., 2005) as well as being a consistent factor cited in successful elective PE programs across BC (Gibbons, 2009).

The New Moves program included a parental component aimed at enhancing parental support for the girls. Fourteen postcards containing information related to PA, social support, or nutrition were mailed home every 2–3 weeks throughout the intervention and maintenance periods. Parents indicated that the postcards provided useful information, and helped stimulate conversation with their daughters on related topics (Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Hannan, & Rex, 2003a).

2.2.8 Community links. Studies on successful PE programs revealed that an important component of these programs was the linking of activities in PE to those available in the

community. In the New Moves PE program, each week a community guest instructor came to lead activities such as aerobic dance, self-defense, kickboxing, water aerobics, and yoga. The girls were exposed to a variety of role models of different body types, and ethnicities, and to a range of possible physical activities that were available within the community. Girls were also exposed to PA opportunities within the community via field trips to local community centers, recreation facilities, and parks (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2003a). Similarly, in the TAAG intervention (Webber et al., 2008), staff identified school and community partners to plan and implement programs and events. Community partners included the YWCA, local health clubs, and community recreation centers. Examples of programs included after-school aerobics class, before-school open gym, basketball camp, touch football, and weekend canoe programs. These programs did not replace PE class, but instead offered students further chances to be physically active. These additional programs resulted in the intervention girls averaging 7.3 more minutes of MET-weighted minutes of MVPA than girls in the control schools (Webber et al., 2008).

Jones, Hoelscher, Kelder, Hergenroeder, & Sharma (2008) created the Incorporating More Physical Activity and Calcium in Teens (IMPACT) intervention in order to increase bone growth in middle school girls (grades 6 and 7). They used a pretest-posttest control group design with twelve middle schools in Central Texas (six intervention and six control schools). They found that the following variables were statistically significant in the intervention schools: daily minutes of vigorous PA (mean difference = 6.00↑ minutes), daily after school activity minutes (mean difference = 8.95↑ minutes), and daily weekend activity minutes (mean difference = 19.00↑ minutes). The authors believed that one of the reasons for the positive findings with respect to after-school and weekend PA levels may be that the intervention strongly encouraged

students to engage in outdoor activity. Students were provided ideas and suggestions for staying active in the community on both evenings and weekends.

Finally, many of the successful senior PE courses in the Gibbons (2009) study included extensive use of community facilities. Several of the young women emphasized the importance of becoming comfortable in these facilities.

2.3 Summary

These aforementioned studies show that researchers and PE teachers can collaborate in order to design PE courses that are girl-friendly and are rooted in principles important to girls. Evidence indicates that if PE courses incorporate such features as those discussed above, physical educators can establish and sustain the involvement of female students. Successful PE programs offered during the critical developmental period of adolescence have the potential to confer important health benefits to these individuals over time. Additionally, effective PE programs that increase PA among adolescents could reduce obesity prevalence and reduce disease risk in youth and adults.

It has been shown that the majority of adolescent girls are disengaged in PE and these girls have been provided a voice through questionnaires, focus groups and interviews in qualitative studies. Fortunately, there is also sufficient evidence to show how to gain and maintain girls' interest and participation in PE and PA. Promising PE practices exist and these have been shown through case studies of programs and RCT interventions. However, there is still a need to know the voices and experiences of girls who have participated in a positive PE practice and have chosen to continue in elective PE. Through this literature review, the opportunity for qualitative examination of girls' experiences continuing in a tailored elective PE course lead to the purpose of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of girls who continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. This chapter presents the methodology used to address the research questions, including a description of the design of the study, the participants for the study, the background of the researcher, and a description of how data was collected and analyzed. To date, focus groups have been the most common method used in the literature to reveal the reasons behind girls' dislike of PE; they were also most commonly used to obtain formative data to aid the design of programs and interventions. A case study design has been most commonly used to highlight successful programs, whereas, the majority of the multi-component PA intervention studies used randomized control trials and included both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to collect different forms of data from a variety of sources. In order to accurately and holistically examine the experiences of three girls continuing in a tailored elective PE course, this study was designed using a qualitative research methodology.

3.1 Characteristics of Qualitative Research and Interpretative Framework

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research can be defined as, ...a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to

make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(p. 3)

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative method was preferred over a quantitative approach because quantitative data on PE participation, though valuable, cannot offer an in-depth understanding of girls' personal experiences in PE and cannot explain how these experiences influenced their decision to continue in elective PE.

This study was framed within a social constructivism interpretative framework. Social constructivists rely on the participant's views and their subjective meanings of their experiences. They believe that these subjective meanings are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives (Creswell, 2013). The researcher's intent was to interpret the meanings others have about the world. The social constructivism paradigm embraces the following philosophical assumptions: (a) multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others, (b) reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant and shaped by individual experiences, (c) individual values are honoured, and are negotiated among individuals, (d) a literary style of writing is used and an inductive method of emergent ideas are obtained through interviewing and observing (Creswell, 2013). These assumptions were exemplified in the study by reporting different perspectives, relying on the participant's quotes as evidence, spending extensive time in the field, discussing the researcher's own values and presenting her own interpretations in conjunction with the interpretations of the participants, and, finally, by describing, in detail, the context of the study (Creswell, 2013).

A qualitative inquiry was selected for this study because there was a need to explore girls' experiences in PE and their decisions to continue in PE. As very few girls continue in

elective PE, their voices are not often heard in the professional literature. More specifically, a narrative inquiry approach was used in order to provide a complex, detailed understanding of this issue. This detail can only be made possible by talking directly to young women who have lived experiences in PE and have made the decision to continue in elective PE. In reviewing the literature, I was unable to find any narrative inquiry studies in the area of girls in PE. Most studies in this specific area are case studies and use focus groups as their data collection method. These previous studies have not explored the in-depth experiences of girls that can be discovered by using a narrative inquiry approach to learn of their lived stories in PE.

3.2 Narrative Inquiry

A narrative inquiry approach was selected for this study because there is a need to hear the individual stories of girls to learn of their personal experiences in PE. However, before discussing narrative inquiry as an approach it is useful to look at the concept of narrative in general. As Barthes discussed, narrative is everywhere. Narrative is present in myth, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, paintings, cinema, comics, the news, and in conversation. Barthes stated that “under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society...it is simply there, like life itself” (as cited in Sontag, 1982, pp. 251-252). Humans have a fundamental desire to tell stories. However, as Riessman (2008) aptly puts it, “narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative” (p. 4). All conversation and written text is not considered narrative. Developing a sequenced storyline, specific characters, and the particulars of a setting are not required by many verbal and written exchanges (Riessman, 2008). In order to be considered narrative, contingency is a criterion. Whatever the content, narrative demands the consequential linking of events and ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected

(Salmon & Riessman, 2008). Clandinin & Connelly (2000) discuss how narrative can be recognized both as story and inquiry. Narrative as story is the phenomenon or the structured quality of experience to be studied, whereas narrative as inquiry can be described as the pattern of inquiry or method.

A narrative inquiry approach to research begins with the experiences of individuals as expressed and told in stories (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry entails the reconstruction or recreation of a person's experiences, while at the same time recognizing influencing factors such as person, culture, history, and time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Chase (2011),

Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them. Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of discourse...or ordering of experience, a way of understanding ... other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. (p. 421)

Narratives function to create a symbolic bridge between a person's past, present, and future. This method allows the researcher to join life experiences from the past and the present that exist along a continuum, which is how life occurs for the participants. Stories told during the interviews allow the researcher to collaborate with the participants and to understand that the participant's stories are still being lived, relived and retold. Placing experiences within the context of time is a notion to which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as *temporality*: one dimension of a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space; "the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (p. 50). Clandinin and Connelly argue that during any inquiry one focuses on four directions: inward and outward (internal conditions such as feelings, reactions, moral dispositions and existential conditions), and backward and

forward (temporality—past, present, and future). To explore personal experiences, one looks to people's relations with themselves and others and to their environment within the context of time. A narrative approach offered a way of looking at how the girls constructed stories encapsulating their PE experiences and importantly how these past events continued to shape their stories of PE today.

People do not have direct access to others' experiences. In other words, researchers cannot have access to the 'real thing' only the narrator's imitation or *mimesis*: a creation of a representation of events, experiences and emotions (Riessman, 2008). Only the individual can truly know her own experience, and only she can give it meaning. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) the closest that a researcher can come to another's experience is through that person's stories. Researchers have access to the representation of someone's experience only through talk, text, interaction, and interpretation. Narrative inquiry is a way to describe and understand another's experience, a way to explore the phenomenon of experience as lived and told in stories. However, people's stories are never just their own (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each story is an individual version of a broader cultural narrative selected from among the main story forms available in a culture. Stories not only help to construct peoples' lives and provide them with meanings, but also tie individuals to the culture in which they live.

Rather than applying the experiences of the participants to an existing theory, the information that was obtained in this study, and its subsequent analysis, was approached with an open framework to allow themes or threads to develop independently. The threads that emerged from the data allowed for creation of a collection of unique personal narratives on the experiences of three adolescent girls in a tailored elective PE course in a rural high school. The benefit of this approach was that a narrative inquiry illuminated the personal and social

experiences and the involvement of physical activity in their young adult lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

3.3 The Physical Education Course

Girls Actively Living (GAL), the tailored PE course that was the focus of the study, was created by the researcher as an alternative to the regular co-ed PE program in grades 10, 11, and 12. It addresses the specific needs and interests of females and was designed to provide knowledge and develop activities that promote long-term participation in PA. The course content develops students' knowledge of nutrition, wellness components, self-esteem, fitness training, and stress management in order to increase their own well-being; focuses on lifelong recreational and fitness activities such as skating, martial arts, circuit training, Pilates, racquet sports, yoga, boxercise, and aerobics; and utilizes community resources and facilities. Formative assessment is used regularly in order to provide students with feedback on their learning. The course emphasizes a social environment and having fun while being active.

GAL began in the fall of 2007. In its initial year, just over forty girls at Hemery High signed up to take the class, forming two small blocks of GAL. Currently, in its seventh year since inception, three blocks of GAL are offered at the school; totaling over ninety girls in the course.

3.4 Participants

The participants in this study, Willow, Amy, and Kennedy, were in grade 11 or 12 and were enrolled in GAL a second or third time. In narrative inquiry, vast numbers of field texts (a term used for all types of data) are produced by virtue of deep, intensive interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and I believed that three participants provided a sufficient amount of data.

Due to the specific population under study, a purposive sampling strategy was used. Purposive sampling groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question; “which in essence means that a sample from which one can learn the most is selected” (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). After obtaining permission from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Review Board and School Board, I visited the tailored PE class to explain the research project and to recruit potential participants. I discussed my role and responsibilities and those of the participants, including the time that they needed to commit to the inquiry process. This visit was used to start building relationships by developing a rapport with the class.

The rationale for selecting these particular girls to participate in this study was two-fold. First of all, they are members in a unique course that spans three grade levels, 10-12. This means that a girl can choose to enroll in the course in grade 10 when PE is still mandatory and then continue in the course in grades 11 and 12 (if she so desires) when PE is no longer required. Secondly, repeat enrollers will be the specific targets of the study as they made the decision to enroll when PE was no longer required. The girls all attended the same mid-sized high school of approximately 700 students. Hemery High is in a rural area 45 minutes outside of a mid-sized city on Vancouver Island.

3.5 Reflexivity: My Role as Researcher

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) explain that narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Because researchers live storied lives and are storytellers, it is impossible merely to attend to participants’ stories and ignore their own: “When narrative inquirers are in the field, they are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else’s experience. They too are having an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to

explore” (p. 81). The beginning of a research project is the beginning of a new story. The inquiry experience, like all experiences, is a storied one, and we need to tell our own stories. One of the starting points for a narrative research study is the researcher’s own narrative of experience. It is important that researchers who use narrative inquiry reveal and share experiences related to the phenomenon under inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Patton (2002) suggests that a researcher’s own biases and reasons for conducting a study be explicitly considered and stated before the collection of data in order to situate the personal biases she has during the analysis and narrative construction. Similarly, Creswell (2013) uses the term “reflexivity” and this means that the researchers must “position themselves” in the study (p. 47). I recognize that how I write is the reflection of my cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics that I brought to the research. I accept that I shaped the writing that emerged; therefore I ‘positioned’ myself in the study (Creswell, 2013).

My reason for pursuing this topic was that I have experienced firsthand, both as a student and as a teacher, the high dropout rate of adolescent girls in PE and the joyous experiences of some girls who do decide to continue enrolling in elective PE. In order to place my own experiences within the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I have placed them within time (past to present), place (settings), and personal and social (my own feelings and my interactions with others) dimensions.

I really enjoyed PE throughout elementary and middle school. However, I avoided structured sports and activities outside of class; favoring instead playing with animals on my farm and swimming in the lakes with my sister. It was not until I was a teenager in high school that I became obsessed with sport and physical activity in general. I played on my school’s basketball, volleyball, soccer and softball teams, and I also played community soccer and

softball. Considering my high activity level and love of sport it is not surprising that I chose to enroll in PE 11 (an elective course). I was one of four girls in the course; the female participants consisted of myself and three of my closest friends; all of whom played at least three of the same sports as I did. We were all really competitive and loved the team sport emphasis of the elective PE course. We had no problems with the fact that boys surrounded us. Although not as fast or strong as the majority of the boys, we were still able to compete with them, as we were very skilled in the majority of the activities offered in the course. Most of the course content consisted of the team sports that we had been playing competitively for years. I remember wondering at the time why more girls were not in the course with us. I simply believed they were lazy and not athletic and that is why they chose not to continue in PE. It was not until I graduated from high school and I started training to become a PE teacher in university that I began to think that perhaps there were other reasons for the girls' drop-out rates.

It was during these six years of pre-service teacher education that my thoughts on girls in PE began to change. I had one professor whose interest in meeting the needs and interests of girls was contagious. She made me think that it was not the girls' laziness or lack of athleticism that caused them to drop out of PE, but perhaps a foundational issue within PE itself that disengaged them.

My first year of teaching PE was the confirmation for me that there was a need to think about and act on meeting the needs of girls. I taught PE 9-12 fulltime that first year. I witnessed the lack of enthusiasm of the girls in my junior, grade 9 and 10 classes; the stereotypical behaviours manifested themselves: walking during activity, boys not passing to the girls, even daisy chain creation during outdoor units. This lack of engagement in mandatory PE showed itself in the fact that there were four girls enrolled in my senior PE class compared to twenty-

two boys. The four girls consisted of two really athletic and competitive girls (much like myself at their age) and two German exchange students who were placed in the class for socialization purposes and left to go back home half way through the course leaving me with two girls. It was this stark contrast, the fact that many boys' were having their needs and interests met by PE and only two girls were having their needs and interests met, that pushed me into action.

During that first year of teaching, I started designing a PE course that would meet the needs and interests of girls. I asked my junior female students, *if you could design a PE course, what would it look like?* I then set out to design a program that looked as they described. Due to a supportive principal and backed by research provided by my university professor, I was able to add the course to the calendar for my second year of teaching. I called it Girls Actively Living (GAL); a name I felt encompassed the holistic nature that I wanted in the course.

During that first year teaching GAL, I had the unique experience of teaching some of the same girls that I had taught in regular, co-educational PE the year before. It was amazing to see the transformation in their behaviours and attitudes. The first couple of weeks presented some of the same old sayings: "I forgot my PE strip" or "I don't feel well today;" as if out of habit for the girls. However, these quickly slipped away to reveal the girls participating to their full potential; they were sweating and smiling.

GAL is now in its seventh year and the enrollment rates continue to increase. The course has shown me that adolescent girls are not inherently lazy when it comes to physical activity; they simply need a supportive learning environment, authentic assessment and a choice in how they are active in order to realize the benefits of participating in PE.

It is through my experiences as a teacher that I developed an interest in the topic of girls in PE as a researcher. Through research and this particular study I was able to gain insight into

the particular experiences of three girls in this tailored elective course, and how those experiences in the course and before the course inspired them to continue enrolling in elective PE.

As Creswell (2013) states: “We cannot step aside and be ‘objective’ about what we see and write. Our words flow from our own personal experiences, culture, history, and backgrounds” (p. 277). Narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration that involves mutual storytelling in which both the storytellers and the researcher are involved in constructing meaning. I believe that my personal experiences aided me in forming a bond with the participants. When a relationship has been constructed between two people, both voices can be heard; the stories become a shared narrative through the inquiry process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). With this said, I was careful in not sharing my experiences in dialogue with the participants. My awareness of my past and present experiences cautioned me not to lead the participants in a particular direction. When I went into the field to collect data I approached the task with care for the site and the participants (and their individuality), and was reflexive about my role and how it shaped what I saw, heard and wrote.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

As Creswell (2013) discusses, ethical issues can occur throughout all phases of a qualitative research study: “prior to conducting the study, at the beginning of the study, during data collection, in data analysis, in reporting the data, and in publishing the study” (p. 57). Prior to conducting the study I sought ethical approval from the University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREB). This approval made sure that I acted within a code of ethics to protect the rights of the participants and ensure their well-being. According to the requirements of the committee, I ensured that the participants were fully informed of their rights

prior to participating in the research study (University of Victoria, 2012). I sought approval from the principal of the school, the school board, and the teacher of the course before seeking consent from the participants and their parents/guardians.

At the beginning of the study I disclosed the purpose of the study immediately to potential participants. The purpose was contained within the consent form and it was also reiterated verbally during the first meeting. This consent form also outlined the fact that participation in the study was voluntary, that there was no undue risk in participating, and that the participants may withdraw from the study at any point.

During data collection I aimed to create the least disruption to the participants and the school as possible. I asked each of the participants which times worked best for her to conduct the interviews as to limit her missing class time. I was aware that interviewing could “create a power imbalance through a hierarchical relationship” (Creswell, 2013, p. 60); therefore I sought to build trust, avoid leading questions, withhold sharing personal impressions, and avoided disclosing sensitive information to help remove some of this imbalance (Creswell, 2013).

During the data analysis I focused on presenting multiple perspectives, reporting contrary findings, and providing a complex picture of the participants’ lived stories. In reporting the data, used a pseudonym for each participant, the course, the school, and the geographical location in order to protect the participants’ privacy. I was honest about my authorship, the evidence provided in the report, the data, the findings, and the conclusions of the study. I learned how to properly cite the works of others so I avoided plagiarism. I also did not disclose any “information that will potentially harm [the participant] in the present or future” (Creswell, 2013, p. 60).

Finally, when publishing the study, I will share the information with the participants, the teacher of the course, other PE teachers at the school, and the principal of the school. Other than within my thesis, a published article in a journal, and a presentation at a scholarly meeting (as outlined in the consent form), the material will not be used in any other publications. I also disclosed that PE teachers and other adolescent girls might benefit from the research. Some of these above mentioned ethical considerations are further outlined in the following data collection and analysis sections.

3.7 Data Collection

This study used a semi-structured personal interview format to learn the participants' experiences and reasons for continuing in elective PE. Having the participants describe their experiences helped to enrich the literature on girls in PE beyond providing a voice for those girls who decided to drop PE.

Participants were asked to recount their past experiences with PE and their current participation. By using a narrative approach, participants described the personal story of their experience and their views of PE based on their experience. Given the purpose of the study, in-depth interviews were an appropriate method for investigating the experiences of girls who decided to continue in elective PE. As stated by Flintoff and Scraton (2001), "interviews allow a 'voice' for women, and provide an opportunity to define the meaning of PE...in their own words" (p. 6). Interviews are able to delve beneath statistically driven generalizations and have the potential to validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people, especially 'ordinary' women who are liable to be omitted from many research projects (Fraser, 2004).

The interview questions were based on an interview guide (see Appendix B). The interview guide approach was chosen to effectively use the interview time available with the

participants and to capture similar patterns of experience in PE, so consistent questions were used to frame every interview. The interview guide was piloted on an adolescent female, who was a past student in the tailored course. The purpose of the pilot was to test the relevancy, order, and clarity of questions in the interview, in the hopes that the responses given by the participants were congruent with the information sought by the study. In addition, the pilot study also helped me to gain interviewing experience.

In order to help ensure that each participant was as relaxed and comfortable as possible during the interviews, and to develop a climate of trust, the meetings were held at the school, a setting with which the girls were familiar. Interviews lasted between twenty-five and forty-five minutes, and occurred during the GAL block. An important aspect of narrative interviewing is to form dialogic relationships and greater communicative equality (Reissman, 2008). I conducted one interview each with Kennedy and Amy and two interviews with Willow. I asked all three girls after they had an opportunity to review their transcripts if they wanted a second interview to clarify the transcript or discuss any more of their experiences in PE. Only Willow felt she wanted a second interview. In addition to the interviews with each participant, I also had repeated conversations with the three girls on which I kept field notes. I also observed the girls within GAL and kept field notes on their participation and interactions with other students and their teacher.

I conducted all of the interviews. Reissman (2008) believes that “whenever possible, the investigator [should] also serve as interviewer, because the interpretive process begins during conversation” (p. 26). Although I was the creator of the course under study, I was not the teacher during the data collection time frame, nor was I the teacher of the course the previous year. Therefore, none of the participants in the study experienced me as the teacher of GAL.

All participant interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder as well as by *Audacity* recording software on my laptop. Once an interview was concluded I created a transcription of the audiotape. The digital files were transcribed, verbatim, into a word processing document. I took personal notes during the interviews of my own reflections and impressions from the interviews, noting non-verbal cues. Textual information was only one component of the interview transcript; it was also important to pay attention to the narrator's linguistic practices such as word choice, hesitations, sighs, stammering, and laughter, as well as facial expressions and body language (Chase, 2011). Personal verbatim transcripts were reviewed by the participants for accuracy of the discussion in the interviews. This served as a member-check and allowed me to include the girls' voices in the analysis of the field texts and reduce researcher bias, keeping the study rooted in the girls' voices. It also served as an additional data collection method because the girls were invited to read their own interviews and I provided them with a physical space on their transcripts to add further comments about their experiences. They had the option of deleting specific statements or including additional information that they recalled after the interview. By engaging in this reflexive and collaborative approach I invited and enabled the participants to reflect on the accounts they had given in the interviews. Each participant chose to participate in this member validation process. Amy and Kennedy both made changes and additions to their transcripts, whereas Willow, although she read the entire document, did not feel the need to change anything about her interview transcript. The data from all of the interviews (audio and verbatim transcriptions) were reviewed multiple times as the interviews were being completed and again at the end of the data collection period. Details of this data analysis process are presented in the next section of this chapter.

3.8 Data Analysis

The processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation often occur simultaneously during qualitative research (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). Interpretation is a means to knowledge production that involves processes of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). Although the following sections describe the data analysis process in a series of steps, these phases are overlapping and non-sequential. Interpretation occurred at all stages and there was constant retelling and reworking of the data during the entire process.

3.8.1 Composing the field texts. In qualitative research, the data analysis phase often overlaps the data collection phase. As the data analysis began, I moved back and forth between data analysis and data collection in order to create and explain the findings (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). During the interviews and listening to the recordings afterwards, the first 'phase' of the analysis involved hearing the stories narrated to experience the emotions of participants (Fraser, 2004). Registering emotions stimulated through the discussions, the researcher reflected on the body language used and the feelings depicted and/or described (Fraser, 2004). Field notes were used to describe the feelings that emerged. Taking notes about the time, place and emotional climates of the interviews proved useful because they affected the subsequent interpretations made (Fraser, 2004).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) named what researchers would usually call data 'field texts' instead because in narrative inquiry, "they are created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of field experience" (p. 92). Composing field texts, although considered part of data collection, is also an interpretive process. Interpreting what is said is a listening skill. During the interview each participant told her story.

Because this was a relational activity, I helped shape the telling of stories by responding in certain ways, such as smiling, encouraging, empathizing, questioning, or clarifying, which ultimately influences the formation of the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Fraser, 2004). As Neander & Skott (2006) phrase it, “the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation” (p. 297). Therefore, my role as researcher and my field notes were essential to the analysis.

The interview material was then transcribed. Transcriptions were useful because they offered a more accurate record of the interview than memory alone (Fraser, 2004). Transforming recorded interviews into written text was a process of writing that was both interpretive and constructive. Decisions were made about how to represent the stories and what to include or discard from the interview. Transcribing was as much a form of interpretation and analysis as it was a technical activity (Fraser, 2004). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us that selectivity is important throughout the research process and that when we foreground certain aspects, others in turn become less visible.

As well as conducting all of the interviews myself, I also transcribed all of the interviews myself. While time consuming, transcribing the interviews oneself carries many benefits. The main benefit derived is how close I was able to come to the stories. This time helped to piece together new meanings in the latter phases of analysis (Fraser, 2004).

Once each transcription was complete, the taped interview was listened to several times while reading the transcript at the same time. Interpretive comments were written on the transcripts as needed, and the audio recordings were listened to for storylines and main points of the stories and contradictions were identified in the content or manner in which a story was told.

Gaps, silences, repetitions, or tensions were also identified (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Fraser, 2004).

3.8.2 Narrative coding: Sorting the field texts. Before composing the research texts, or narratives, one must first sort the numerous field texts; this involved careful coding of journal entries, field notes and interview transcripts with notation of dates, contexts for the compositions of the field texts, people involved, and topics addressed. Many hours were spent reading and re-reading the field texts in order to construct a summarized account of what was contained within them. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this initial analysis as narrative coding and it involved codes such as, names of people, places where actions and events occurred, storylines that interweaved, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerged and continuities and discontinuities that appeared. A field text is, to a degree, an individual and isolated text with its own narrative qualities; some were more storied than others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Sorting the field texts involved combining all field text, identifying and separating stories, and regrouping them. To begin, all related field texts were merged for each participant, including the transcription and field notes (Morrow, 2005). Time was spent immersed in the various data to ensure that the participants' experiences were thoroughly understood (Morrow, 2005). The long narratives were then separated by rereading everything to identify individual and specific stories. This activity was difficult because the participants jumped around in telling their personal stories (Fraser, 2004).

Field texts are close to experience. They are descriptive and are shaped around particular events. They are not constructed with reflected intent. Not until the responses to questions of meaning and social significance emerge that field texts ultimately shape into research texts.

These are the questions that shape the analysis and interpretation of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.8.3 From field texts to research texts. The narrative composition was done by ‘restorying’ the transcripts into individual narratives. Restorying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence. Often when individuals tell a story, this sequence may be missing or not logically developed, and by restorying, the researcher provides a causal link among ideas. In the restorying of the participants’ stories and the telling of the threads, the narrative researcher includes rich detail about the setting or context of the participants’ experiences. All three narratives were constructed to follow a similar plot line, for presentation and for consistency when reading each experience. The timing of events and the context were also incorporated as key elements of the narratives. The narratives were structured around the girls’ past and present PE experiences and the reasons they continued in elective PE. The restorying approach centered on participants’ experience within elementary, middle, and high school PE, from both a personal and social perspective. The narratives also considered context and the continuity of time as key elements in the development of each story. This approach allows for a broader more holistic view of the participant’s experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). All names and locations were changed or removed to ensure anonymity of the participants.

The move from field texts to research texts is a complex process that entails shifting from living stories with the participants to retelling stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is here that the stories of the participants merge with the researcher and result in new collaborative stories—a reconstruction of the many to make a richer, more condensed and coherent story. In

the creation of research texts, issues of voice, signature, and audience must also be attended to (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is important that researchers determine how they will use their voices to interpret and represent the participants' voices. The findings of a qualitative investigation should illustrate a balance between the researcher's interpretations and supporting quotations from the participants (Morrow, 2005). A narrative strategy was used to write the research text in which the researcher's and participants' voices were connected and separated in a particular way; the participants' stories are presented, and the researcher's interpretations follow.

3.8.4 Threads across narratives. It is important to recognize that narratives are particular to an individual. However, researchers can use a cultural lens to focus on similarities and differences across narratives and identify patterns or "threads" during particular times in participants' stories (Chase, 2011). The narratives were examined for threads that address the research questions. This 'phase' of the analysis involved examining the individual narratives for commonalities and differences that existed among and between participants. Connecting plots, events and/or threads were clustered together for analysis (Fraser, 2004). Analysis of threads, across interviews with similarly situated people contributes to a stronger understanding of those environments and their impact of the individual narratives (Chase, 2011). Differences and similarities are thematic of other aspects of the analysis. While considering how the stories aligned with the initial assumptions of the research, 'findings' were noted that were inconsistent, counter-intuitive, surprising and/or atypical (Fraser, 2004). Analysis was approached from the perspective of seeking informative and actionable answers to the research questions.

A key focus of this study was to highlight PE experiences so the narratives were examined for this focus and essence. Rather than pulling pieces from each story out of context, I

sought key themes from the experiences as the participants related them. As Kramp (2004) explains, the themes that revealed themselves across the narratives were like “threads” that, when woven together, created a pattern of experience. My task was to grab on to these threads by lifting appropriate words and phrases of the narrators from the texts. By using the participants’ own words, which were more colorful and distinctive, I was able to communicate the unique particularities of what the experiences in PE were really like for each of the girls.

I read through all three narratives multiple times and highlighted passages that emerged as resonant threads across all of the stories of the participants’ PE experiences. These threads were then reviewed and organized. The threads were not predetermined before analysis but rather came directly from the data. This inductive process involved consulting the transcripts, interview recordings, and field notes many times to support the information taken from each narrative and ensure that the information used was fully within the context of each participant’s past and present PE experience.

3.8.5 Stories for social change. As Reissman (2008) states, “stories can mobilize others into action for progressive social change” (p. 9). The goal of narrative inquiry is to work collaboratively with participants to improve the quality of their everyday experiences. This approach can be thought of as pragmatic or applied (Chase, 2011). For the individual participant, the act of narrating life events can create a very strong and positive change. However, narrative researchers not only create a space where stories can be told and heard, but they also help to open up possibilities for social change by connecting individuals’ stories to the broader stories of a group, creating a community of stories. Collective stories become integral to social movements (Chase, 2011). This collective of stories may be heard farther and wider than they would if they stood alone.

Chase (2011) suggests that we need to know more about narrative environments that make possible and even encourage creative explorations of self, identity, community, and reality. In other words, she suggests that we have as much to learn from narrative inquiry into environments where something is working as we do from inquiry into environments where injustice reigns. She states that it is important to know what is going on narratively in the environments where something is working – when individuals, groups, or organizations marshal ordinary resources in their everyday lives to strengthen their relationships and their communities (Chase, 2011). It is my hope that this study will make both a contribution to PE research as well a practical contribution to the field of physical education.

Due to the narrative approach that was taken in this inquiry, software was not used for data analysis. I preferred to hand-code in order to remain close to the data and ensure that each story remained as unique and intact as possible. In developing each narrative I reviewed transcripts several times. The most valuable analytic tool was that of listening and re-listening to the interviews. The interviews were also listened to while reading the transcripts, to ensure that both were concurrent in nature. I felt it was important to hear the words as spoken by the participants' themselves. Transcription of the interviews and composition of the narratives was completed using word processing software.

3.9 Assessing the Rigour of the Study

In order to evaluate the quality of this study, three of the most common criteria used to evaluate qualitative research were chosen: credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). The following section is a description of each criterion and how the researcher met it within the study.

3.9.1 Credibility. Credibility refers to the faithfulness to the description of the phenomenon in question. It addresses the issue of whether there is consistency between the participants' views and the researcher's representation of them (Ryan et al., 2007). Credibility may be enhanced by the researcher describing and interpreting her experiences as researcher, and also by consulting with participants and allowing them to read and discuss the research findings (Ryan et al., 2007). Credibility may also be demonstrated by prolonged engagement, observation and audit trails (Ryan et al., 2007).

One of the strategies used in this study to ensure credibility was multiple data collection, including in-depth interviews and field notes taken on conversations and observations. To determine if the interpretations reflected the experiences of the participants, the findings were shared with the participants and their feedback was invited. Collaboration involves negotiating relationships between the researcher and the participant to lessen the potential gap between the narrative told and the narrative reported. The data was treated in ways that sought to ensure that the tone and meaning of the participants' words were represented. In order to strengthen the accuracy of the interpretations, numerous excerpts from the participants' narratives are included in conjunction with the researcher's interpretations.

Issues with the researcher's influence also affect credibility. Subjectivity is valued in qualitative research; however, to demonstrate that the findings are grounded in and from the participants' perspectives, it was important to explicate the ways in which the researcher addressed subjectivity. Any influences the inquirer potentially had upon the inquiry were consciously attended to such as I have done through the telling of my own experiences earlier in this chapter. My implicit assumptions and biases have been articulated to others. The position as

researcher and co-constructor of meaning was embraced as integral to the interpretation of the data (Morrow, 2005).

It is considered impossible to separate the researcher from the researched. Rather, what needs to be addressed is how to fairly represent the experiences of the participants (Morrow, 2005). The strategies that were used to represent the participants' realities fairly included: asking for clarification during the data-collection process; using open-ended interview questions that encouraged the participants to look deeply into their experiences; and approaching each participant and each story with the view that each is unique (Morrow, 2005).

During the writing of the results, the audio files, transcriptions, and narratives were repeatedly returned to for familiarization with the data. This helped to understand each participant's tone, original emphasis, emotion and voice of her experience from her interview that was not easily conveyed in the written word. It also helped to categorize and theme data appropriately to accurately reflect meaning. The constant comparison across and between participants helped to maintain individual voices and threads amongst the collection of narratives. This return to original data also helped to ensure that the researcher's biases and personal experiences were controlled and excluded from the participants' words.

3.9.2 Dependability. Dependability or auditability is an integral component of rigour and involves the researcher giving the reader sufficient information to determine how dependable the study and the researcher are. A study may be deemed auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the trail used by the investigator and potentially arrive at comparable conclusions. A study may be shown to be dependable by producing evidence of a decision trail at each stage of the research process. This provides the reader with evidence of the decisions and choices made regarding methodological issues throughout the study and entails discussing explicitly the

reasons for such decisions (Ryan et al., 2007). A detailed explanation of the decision trails used in this study is included in this chapter to enable dependability of all aspects of the inquiry.

3.9.3 Confirmability. Confirmability requires the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached. It is concerned with establishing that findings are clearly derived from the data (Ryan et al., 2007). In order to ensure confirmability, numerous segments were used from each participant's story to demonstrate her experiences and substantiate interpretations. This study utilized verbatim transcripts and relies heavily on the actual spoken words of the participants. Transcripts, interview tapes, and field notes were consulted to support the information taken from each narrative and ensure that the information used was fully within the context of each participant's past and present experience. Another strategy to ensure that interpretations of the data were accurate involved returning repeatedly to the field texts and spending time deeply immersed in the data. The final strategy to ensure confirmability was presenting the findings in a way that assures a balance between the stories of the participants and the researcher's interpretations.

3.10 Summary

The narrative inquiry methodology presented in this chapter outlined the qualitative approach used in studying the experiences of three girls in elective PE. Examining PE experiences through an analysis of narrative approach allowed for the reflection on their participation in PE. Issues revolving the assessment and assurance of rigour were also discussed.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study explored the experiences of three girls who chose to continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. A narrative inquiry design was employed to capture the girls' subjective experiences in PE and to allow some comparisons between them to both illuminate the individual features and to offer some common threads among the narratives. Insight was gained into their past and current experiences in PE and their reasons for continued enrollment. The research questions focused on how the girls' experiences with the course content, learning environment, and assessment in the tailored course affected their perceptions of PE. Also of interest were how their experiences outside of PE influenced their desire to continue in elective PE, and how their experiences in the tailored elective PE course affected their perceptions of physical activity.

Willow, Amy, and Kennedy were selected to participate because they had made the decision to continue to enroll in elective PE. Although their experiences throughout elementary, middle, and high school PE varied, they all made the decision to enroll in GAL during their final two years of high school. The following are the students' pseudonyms: Willow, Amy, and Kennedy, respectively.

All three girls were competent in providing insightful descriptions of their experiences in PE. From the onset of the study, the girls and I discussed that I needed their help to understand their experiences in PE from their perspectives. All interviews occurred in the same location: a meeting room adjacent to the main school office. I offered the girls juice and snacks to try to make them feel more comfortable and in order to provide a relaxed atmosphere. I used a digital recorder as well as *Audacity* software on my laptop in order to record all of the interviews. Observations and conversations with the girls occurred within GAL. During their class time I

observed the three participants in the physical setting of the course, interacting with classmates, and participating in the physical activities. During these observations I acted as both a participant as observer when I would participate in the same activities as the girls, and sometimes as an observer as participant when I would watch the class but not participate (Creswell, 2013). I recorded field notes during, or immediately after, my observations. All interviews, conversations, and observations occurred between September 2012 and January 2013.

As mentioned previously, in conducting this research, I did not have a neutral position as a teacher of GAL. I brought my beliefs, passions, biases, and experiences with me to the research. I tried as much as possible to remove these biases and my voice from the narratives of the students. I strived to not provide any value judgments about what they said, but validated each student's right to say what she thought, believed, and felt by actively listening to what she had to say. I interpreted their narratives and pulled from them descriptions that appeared most salient to their PE experiences. Each participant read a draft of her interview transcript and provided suggestions for changes or additions.

This study included an emphasis on the details of each of the girl's accounts as well as some comparisons of their stories to both offer some commonalities, overall perspectives of their experiences, and in turn to employ these to help elaborate their personal narratives. Through drawing out points of contrast and similarity it is possible to see what is both common and distinctive about their PE experiences. As a teacher I felt this to be important since it is necessary to attend to individual need as well as contemplate ideas about commonalities, shared needs and resources required to plan and teach PE. I recognize that the girls in this study are both distinctive in the details of the specific circumstances of their lives but may also share common contexts as all three of them made the decision to continue to enroll in a tailored elective PE

course I therefore sought to consider not only what was distinctive about these narratives but also common to the participants of GAL.

This chapter presents Willow, Amy, and Kennedy's narratives. Each narrative begins with a description of the young woman. Then her past experiences in elementary, middle and high school PE will be presented, followed by her current experiences in GAL, and her physical activity outside of PE. In order to address the research questions, the PE experiences will be focused around course content, the learning environment, and assessment. After each narrative, I have provided my interpretations of the narrative told. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the dominant narrative threads which were connected across all three stories with the aim of representing commonalities in the PE experiences of the participants.

4.1 Willow: A Narrative Account

Willow, a 16 year old white female, is in grade 11. She has pale skin with freckles, deep red hair that flows to just below her shoulders, and dark, lively, brown eyes. She is cheery and personable and could easily be described as 'bubbly'. On the first day of interviews, as I was waiting in the Girls Actively Living (GAL) meeting room (a large weight room), she came up to me immediately and started to chat. Although I had planned to interview Amy on that day, she was absent from school. Willow was very accommodating; even though she had already changed into PE clothes for the lesson, she was willing to be interviewed instead. She followed me to the interview room in her grey baggy jogging pants and blue t-shirt. She was tramping down the hall in sock feet with her running shoes in hand because she *didn't feel like wearing shoes today* (Field Note – Oct. 24th, 2012). During our first interview she sat directly across

from me with a tall posture and maintained eye contact. Although she told me that she is really shy and often bullied, I would never have guessed it by the confident way she carries herself.

Willow is currently enrolled in GAL for the second time. She completed GAL the previous year when she was in grade 10 (when PE was still mandatory) and has enrolled in it again during her first semester of grade 11. She explained to me why she chose to take GAL over regular, co-educational PE in grade 10:

...I asked Mr. Taggert, my teacher in Life Skills, if he could put me in GAL in grade 10, because I wouldn't be able to do the like regular activities with the other PE class because my knees are so bad they'll just give out... Pretty much every time I run they give out and I fall down and I hurt my knees... (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow explained that the co-ed PE classes run once a week: *They do a lot of running, and that would put more stress on my knees* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Weekly running is not a requirement of GAL. When I asked about the source of her knee problems, she explained:

...what happened was my brother bounced me up on a trampoline 10 feet high in the air and I came back down, I got a crack in my skull and I pretty much almost broke my knees... and my ankles because I came between the springs, upside down and hit my head on a rock and.....he didn't do it on purpose or anything, it was an accident (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow frequently mentioned health problems throughout our interviews and conversations and how these limited her ability to run and walk long distances.

4.1.1 Past PE experiences. When I asked Willow about her past experiences during elementary and middle school PE she recalled the course content: *...in elementary we used to play volleyball all the time and ah, soccer, and basketball, and all kind of fun sports* (Interview

Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). She explained that one of her teachers in middle school offered the activities in an interesting way: *She did it with a hat. She wrote down, she had her hat, she always brought...it's like a...Willa Wonka's hat* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow explained that her teacher had multiple slips of paper within this hat, each with a name of a physical activity on it. I asked her if the students or the teacher selected the activities from the hat:

We did, she went around the circle and we got to pick out one at a time...and then who got the most. But she would usually put in mostly soccer for like running but one day we would do volleyball for throwing and for upper strength...and then soccer for lower strength...and then the next day running and upper body strength (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). *Um... if we drew out soccer we would go to one corner...like she'd have four activities...like volleyball, soccer, baseball or basketball...and if someone would pick basketball they'd go over to the far left corner and if someone picked soccer they would go over to the front left corner...and then soccer far right corner, and then so on so on. So if there was one person in one corner and then there was like eight in another we'd pick that one. Then the second one that had more in it we would do that one the next day.* (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012).

Willow explained that this system allowed for some student choice as well: *If we got the same amount of two, like soccer and volleyball you would do one half of the gym volleyball and one half of...yeah* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow felt that there was some variety in the activities offered during elementary and middle school PE. She stated *we did a lot of activities. We went for trips maybe...once a month. We went on a lot of walks though* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Their trips often

involved going to a local recreation center to go swimming or skating (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012). However, away from the team sports, walks and occasional field trip, Willow could not remember participating in any fitness or dance activities in elementary or middle school PE. She enjoyed the fact that she did not have to run much in middle school PE: *I liked...PE 8 because we didn't do as much running cause I had a doctor's note that I can't run as much because my knees are so bad* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Despite stating that she *loved* PE in elementary and middle school and that *it was so fun*, she also explained that she was bullied a lot by other students. This occurred within PE and the larger school context: *Um...all I remember is that they used to talk behind my back and stuff like that...that's pretty much what I remember...have you ever heard of kick a ginger day?* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). When I stated that I had heard of this day, Willow continued with her tale of bullying: *I was the very first one to get kicked in the school.... I had to go to the hospital because I was bruised from my ribs to my feet* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Throughout the interviews, Willow shared numerous stories of being bullied, mostly in the larger school context rather than in PE. She was very comfortable in sharing these stories and brought them up freely. Willow felt she was a loner in elementary and middle school: *I didn't have any friends, I was just in my room and read a book and listen to my Ipod and just laid low and hung out with...my family and that's pretty much it* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

When I asked Willow about how physically competent she felt at the various activities in elementary and middle school, she explained that she felt competent in some of the sports, but not others: *...at volleyball I was pretty confident that I was pretty good, but other sports, the people that bullied me was in it and she purposely put me in it* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow explained that she did not feel as competent at soccer or basketball because she

was often teased during these activities. On the other hand, Willow felt fairly confident walking as long as it was not too great a distance: *I felt pretty skilled by walking far distances, but not too far* (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012). She emphasized again that walks that were too long or strenuous aggravated her various injuries.

Despite the bullying Willow experienced in middle school, she described the learning environment of her grade 7 PE class in a positive light: *Um it was a fun class. It was um a warm class. The people liked each other and respected each other and stuff like that. There was about 4 or 5 kids that were pretty ignorant and self-centered* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow explained that her teacher helped to create this positive learning environment by putting the students into groups when they went for walks. Within these groups of 3 or 4, Willow was often placed with students that previously bullied her and she ended up befriending some of them. The teacher also positively impacted the learning environment by being fun. Willow explained that even when she did not like a particular activity offered in PE, her teacher still managed to make it fun. When I inquired how her teacher managed this, Willow responded:

I don't know, but it was very weird...Like she'd pull things out of her sleeves all the time and throw it at us and like she'd have like a pair of boxers in her sleeve and then like throw them on someone's head (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012).

Willow clarified that although the teacher was funny and entertained the class, she also disciplined the class when students were not prepared for PE:

...sometimes we would, for PE, we would go out and pick up some garbage and people didn't have any PE strip so we would pick up garbage...she would make the whole class do it and she said "good job now the class has to skip out on a trip because of you" so we all had to go out and pick up garbage.

Willow clarified that if one person forgot strip, the entire class would be responsible for picking up garbage. I then asked Willow if she had ever been the person who forgot strip:

(Shakes her head “no”)...maybe once...but that was only because I totally forgot that I had PE and it was like a half day and I totally forgot it was like the first block and I said “oh man, I forgot my PE strip at home.”

Willow explained that she did not get angry with others for forgetting strip and having to pick up garbage; *[she] didn't mind it because [they] were cleaning up the environment* (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012).

As for assessment in elementary and middle school PE, Willow found it difficult to remember any forms of assessment specific to PE and often described assessment in other academic subjects:

Um...we would just hand it in and the teacher would just mark it and we would, would get like get 15% or 20% or whatever it is...but I would usually get like 92% on that stuff.

I enquired about what she was submitting and she responded, *um...Science and Socials...* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). When I asked her about assessment in PE specifically, all she could remember was an example of grading from a volleyball unit: *um...we did a couple of sheets when we were doing volleyball like where was the court, and how to set it up and I got about 27 on that. I wasn't really proud about that.* When prompted, Willow clarified that her grade was 27 out of 100. I then asked her if these sheets were the only assessment tools she could remember and she responded, *pretty much* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

4.1.2 Current PE experiences. Willow jumped from PE 8 (in middle school) to GAL in grade 10. She did not take PE in grade 9 (the first year of high school), so she did not experience the regular, co-educational PE program at Hemery High. Willow took GAL in grade 10, is

currently enrolled in it in her grade 11 year, and plans to take it again next year in grade 12. When I asked Willow what it is like to be in GAL, she simply stated, *fun*. When I asked how GAL differed to her co-ed PE experiences in middle school, Willow provided me with a one word answer: *better*. She explained that *grade 8 was just boring (laughing)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012) in comparison. When I asked her to clarify what made GAL *better*, her responses focused mostly on the learning environment:

Not a boy teacher. And... we go outside more and, we usually just stayed in all the time...plus we like the teacher [now], and it's funner with girl teachers (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow explained that the girls-only aspect of the learning environment in GAL was not that important to her; that it was the *environment in general* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012) that mattered more to her. Willow told me that she is not bullied as much now that she is in high school and that she has acquired some close friends since middle school: *And then in middle school I had like 1 or 2 friends that I met in grade 6 and then we became best friends and now we're still best friends, we're pretty much sisters now* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). I asked Willow if these friends were also enrolled in GAL and she explained that they were not, but that *it doesn't matter...they can have a choice of what class they want, it's not what I want, it's...what they want, it's their choice because it's school* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Even though Willow does not have close friends in the course, she explained that the learning environment is still welcoming. The course serves as a safe haven from the bullying she sometimes still experiences at high school. I enquired about what makes Willow more confident in GAL than in other courses:

...it makes me more confident because the people in there that are nice to me and they know me well enough that I can be weird sometimes (laughing) that it's okay to be weird and have fun.

I then prompted her further on the feeling of the class:

Um, sometimes when I'm having a bad day, I just stay quiet, and don't really do anything, I just stand there. Like yesterday I wasn't feeling very well, like people were being mean to me yesterday and talking behind my back and I was... just quiet, and not having a very good day; I just was not very happy.

I asked Willow if this bullying occurred in GAL or in school in general and she replied: *In school in general, it's never in GAL... I feel really good there because people don't make fun of me or anything* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow credited the teacher of GAL in creating this safe learning environment. Willow explained that Ms. Litto is supportive and understanding of Willow:

She knows by my past what's happened to me and that's why I am so quiet, and distant, and don't want to work with other people because I'm afraid that people will kick me, and judge by me....not what's inside. Because I've been bullied for so many years that it's harder for me to talk to people that I don't know...and I can't really speak that well when I'm with people that I don't really know. Like I know you, because I've met you before. I can talk to you perfectly fine. Not be nervous or anything because I've known you for a bit.

As Willow mentioned not wanting to work with other people, I asked her if she is ever placed in groups in girls she does not know well in GAL: *Sometimes I don't really want to work with people, but Ms. Litto makes me (laughing) and then I start opening up my eyes pretty much and*

start talking to people (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow explained that she starts to feel better after this occurs.

Willow told me that she has also lost a lot of weight since enrolling in GAL and that her confidence has grown because she is now able to see improvements in her fitness: *...a couple of years ago I was way over weight for my age I was about like 14 and I was like almost 200 pounds. And ever since I started...I lost a lot of weight...I like running past people now* (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012).

In addition to feeling safe and confident because of the learning environment, Willow also commented on differences in the course content between PE 8 and GAL:

Um, middle school we went for walks like maybe once a week...but [in GAL] pretty much every day we do a lot of sports outside and more outside and some inside and we go for a lot of walks. I like going for walks because it strengthens up my knees (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

[In GAL] we do...a lot of fun games, and we don't run as much... (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

I prompted Willow to further discuss the course content now offered to her in GAL. When asked if there was much variety, Willow responded that the activities are

...different everyday... Ms. Litto has a chart by her office like today we we're doing badminton, and then the next day I don't know what we're doing, but we're doing something... and then the next day's something different, and the next day's something different...it's a surprise (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

When I asked her if there was a main focus on a particular category of activity, Willow said:

...we do get a bunch of things, but I think with Ms. Litto, I think she likes the more...like activity...and like running and walking and... like activity sports, not just hanging back all the time...(Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow appeared pleased with the variety in course content, so I asked her what impact this variety had on her and she replied: *Fun. It just boosts up my ability and confidence and its fun* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). As Willow mentioned confidence, I asked her about her perceived competence at the activities in GAL. She explained that she felt *pretty good* at most of the activities, but that dance was a source of perceived incompetence: *some things like dancing, I get...shy, and not very active, just stand there. Sometimes I chew my lip, like right here, there's like a scar there* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow indicated a scar on the right side of her bottom lip. She explained that the chewing is a nervous behaviour.

When I asked her if it was the performance aspect of dance that made her nervous, she responded: *Sometimes, it's mostly acting in front of other people and stuff like that...cause I can't get enough confidence to get on stage and do stuff with other people* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Along with a sense of variety within the course content, Willow also felt she had some sense of choice in the activities offered to her in GAL. Willow once again mentioned the chart that her teacher uses to display the activities and the choice that is built into the week's activities: *um...when we don't want to do what is on the chart she gives us a choice. We can go outside, go for a walk, or we can go for a run, or we can go down to the beach, or play a game outside, or stuff like that* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

When we talked of assessment in GAL, Willow discussed how the grades were presented to the students: *She puts our marks up on the board where our chart is for the class*

and then we all go look there, but I go last because it's so crowded (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow explained that her grade in GAL is based mostly on participation in the daily activities: *She does it by 5s on our activity and our... (Thinking about the word)...* I suggested the word *participation* and Willow said, *that's it, thank you! (Laughing)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). When I asked if anything else was considered during assessment, Willow responded, *sometimes she gives us a sheet that we have to make up a game and we have to talk [about] it in a speech in front of the class and I can sometimes do it now because in PE I can do it, sometimes, but not all the time* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

As Willow is currently in grade 11 her enrollment in GAL is elective because PE is only mandatory up to and including grade 10. When I asked her what contributed to her decision to take GAL as an elective she explained: *because with PE, it gives you more credits, and I need some credits to graduate, plus I like that class.* When I probed further to why Willow chose GAL over other electives offered at the school, she said *I don't really know any other electives so I only pretty much know PE, Girls Actively Living* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). However, Willow also discussed how her positive experience in GAL in grade 10 also influenced her decision to enroll in the course again in grade 11. She discussed her decision to enroll in the course with her family and with one of her close girlfriends:

I have a choice if I'm wanting to go in PE or not, but [my parents] said it would help my knees, and my ankles, and it would help me boost up my confidence and stuff like that (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

I asked Amanda if she wanted to be in it with me, but she said, "I'm good, and I want to be in with the other class", and I said "ok", but I went into it anyways (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

When I asked Willow why she chose to enroll in GAL rather than the co-ed PE program in grade 11, she talked again about her injuries:

They do a lot of running, and that would put more stress on my knees and when my knees start to hurt, my rib starts to hurt, just the one on the one side here, it was [more] badly bruised than the other ones (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow and I spent some time discussing other girls' opinions of PE. She mostly spoke of her friend Amanda, another grade 11 student, who is enrolled in the regular co-ed PE program:

Amanda comes to me every day, "I like this class, I want to go in it again" she's like, "how was your class" and I am just like, "It was fun, Ms. Litto was joking around of course, being funny" (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow spoke often of her best friend Amanda and her love of PE. I asked her specifically what Amanda likes so much about PE and she explained that, *she likes the running...she likes walking, she likes going on the trips, she likes skating, and rollerblading* (Interview Transcript – Nov. 21st, 2012). When I asked if her other friends or other girls she knew in grade 11 enrolled in PE or not, she responded: *Some of them chose to take PE, some of them didn't* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). However, Willow could not offer an opinion to why or why not they chose to enroll.

4.1.3 Physical activity outside of PE. Willow is fairly active outside of school. She told me she walks her dog, Lucky, every day. She said her friends often accompany her on these walks with her dog and that her friends view physical activity very positively: *they love it* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). She explained that this activity outside of school influenced to keep enrolling in PE:

... I went into it because I thought, would it strengthen up my knees? And would it boost up my confidence? And I thought about it for a week and I said I should do it because it would help me (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Willow's parents play a role in encouraging her to be active outside of school despite her health difficulties:

My mom and dad, um they said it would boost up my confidence by walking the dog and it would help my knees too and my ankles. It would help my ribs because last month I had inflammation in the ribs and I had to take Motrin or Advil for it for about 7 weeks (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

After high school is over, Willow plans to remain active: *I was thinking of working with animals but I could take them for walks and for runs and take them to the park and stuff like that* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012). When I asked Willow if GAL has influenced her in any way to lead an active lifestyle, she explained that it has helped to increase her confidence in being independent while being active: *I'd be able to go walk to the beach on my own... because I've walked down to [the beach] from my place* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 24th, 2012).

4.2 Willow: Narrative Analysis

Throughout our conversations together it was challenging to encourage Willow to remain focused on her PE experiences. I had to constantly prompt her to stay on topic as she often wanted to share stories of her home life or of school experiences unrelated to PE. I made a field note immediately after our first interview together:

It was difficult to get Willow to focus on telling experiences in PE specifically. She kept focusing on how she had been bullied in the general middle school context. Often her

comments and examples were not from PE and I had to keep on re-focusing her... (Field note, October 24th, 2012).

Willow seemed to desire talking to me as one would a peer. She would often introduce conversations on popular culture such as the book and film series *Twilight* and other TV shows.

Part way through our first interview, Willow and I were interrupted by a knock on the door. It was one of the education assistance teachers, Ms. Murray, wanting to speak to Willow after our interview. As I did not know Willow and Ms. Murray's connection I decided to speak to her later regarding Willow. From Ms. Murray, I learned that Willow lives with a learning difficulty. She has a learning assistance block once per day, but does not have an education assistant with her in regular classes. Willow acknowledged her learning difficulty and discussed it openly during our conversations. It appeared that she felt comfortable and welcomed in the special needs department and mentioned a number of the supportive staff members to whom she felt connected.

After Ms. Murray told me of Willow's learning difficulty, I enquired about some of the subject matter that Willow introduced during our first interview. For example, she told me a tale of a family pet that became very ill so she shot it to put it out of its misery. I was concerned about such stories:

I learned [from Ms. Murray] that Willow has been known to tell fabricated stories in order to receive attention. As she gets older this trait is getting better but it still happens from time to time... Her fabricated stories tend to focus on her as the victim in order to receive sympathy from the listener (Field Note – Oct. 26th, 2012).

Given this information, I became less confident in the authenticity of Willow's responses; however, regardless of truthfulness, because she tells herself these stories, they are her reality.

As explained by Craig, You, & Oh (2012), “truth in narrative inquiry is fundamentally different from that in quantitative research where a single vision of capital “T” Truth prevails. Instead of one capital “T” Truth, multiple truths that are truthlike are generally sought in narrative inquiry” (p. 279). As a narrative inquirer I had to accept this relativism; this notion that every individual has her own interpretation of events and each is equally valid (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The findings of a narrative inquiry do not seek “truth” or exact conformity to actuality. Narrative inquiry aims rather for the concept of *verisimilitude*, a literary term, which means the writing is clear, engaging, and full of unexpected ideas. The findings become believable and realistic, accurately reflecting all the complexities that exist in real life (Creswell, 2013). Thus, Willow’s stories should be judged according to their narrative fidelity and not their truthfulness.

I learned a lot from my conversations with Ms. Murray. She also shared with me that Willow has a challenging home life and that she is the youngest of five children; she is the only girl with four older brothers. Despite her challenges at home and at school, Ms. Murray explained that GAL has had a positive impact on Willow:

Ms. Murray told me that GAL is very important to Willow and that it is a place where she feels comfortable. She told me that their department (special needs/learning assistance) often places their girls in GAL as it is a more welcoming and comfortable environment than co-ed PE (Field Note – Oct. 26th, 2012).

During our conversations, Willow was more focused on her experiences in GAL than her previous PE experiences. Perhaps because they are current I did not need to prompt her to stay on topic. One portion in particular during our discussion of GAL was interesting for me to hear. When responding to my questions on why she decided to continue in GAL once it became elective I learned that Willow was under the impression that PE provides her with more credits

than other courses. As an educator at Hemery High I know that *PE provides students with the same amount of credits as any other elective in the school, so it is interesting that her perception is that it provides more than other courses* (field note – Oct. 24th, 2012). Willow also stated that she was unaware of any other electives offered at the school. I also made a field note about this comment:

Interesting comment as Willow already mentioned that she was in sewing – another elective offered at the school. This makes me think that she is perhaps confused by the term ‘elective’ (field note – Oct. 24th, 2012).

Despite the numerous bullying stories Willow told throughout our conversations together, the bullying she described mostly occurred in the larger school context throughout her elementary and middle school years; she seemed, overall, pleased with her PE experiences. She described herself as fairly competent in her past PE courses and portrayed positive learning environments during elementary and middle school PE. However, due to the fact that she has *never* felt teased or bullied in GAL, it is a source of emotional safety and a competence for Willow.

4.3 Amy: A Narrative Account

Amy is a quiet 16 year old girl who is currently in grade 11 at Hemery High School. She is thin and her skin is very pale, almost translucent. Her shoulder length blonde hair is dyed bright pink in areas. I saw Amy in the hall the morning prior to our first interview and smiled at her. I noticed that she and her friends hang out in the hall in front of the theatre. This area is quite different to the main commons where the “popular” students tend to gather. When talking to Ms. Litto, she told me that Amy failed GAL the first time in grade 10. However, she also

informed me that Amy has recently had a turn-around and is performing much better this time in GAL. To me, Amy seems responsible and conscientious. I only had to wait 30 seconds in the gym before Amy appeared immediately after the bell, prepared for our first interview.

I had a feeling that Amy was quite nervous during our interview as she cleared her throat numerous times throughout our conversation and often looked down at her hands. She mostly responded to my questions with really short answers. This nervousness was consistent with what I witnessed during my time in GAL – away from quietly chatting with her one girlfriend in the class she stuck mostly to herself and appeared shy. There were, however, times during the interview and my other conversations with Amy that she appeared really confident; holding her head high and maintaining consistent eye contact. Our interview was brief, under 27 minutes in length due to Amy's short answers, but I also had many impromptu conversations with her and a follow-up chat after I received her transcript changes and additions. Between our interview, our conversations, and my observations of her in GAL, I felt that despite her shyness, I had the opportunity to learn quite a lot about Amy over the course of five months.

4.3.1 Past PE experiences. To begin the interview, I asked Amy to recall her past PE experiences in elementary school. She smiled and spoke first of the course content: *We played lots of really fun games.* I prompted her further to see if she could remember any particular games:

Yeah, we would play, I guess it would be a type of laser tag, we'd turn off all the gym lights and put out like the big mats, and...set them up and one person would have a flashlight and they'd go around looking for people...It was a lot of fun...everyone would like hide on the big mats or like behind them... (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

I asked Amy if she could remember any further details about the course content in elementary PE and she recalled the following:

We'd play badminton and floor hockey, I remember playing floor hockey a lot, we'd even have like a team for floor hockey...and we had like a school floor hockey team, and same with basketball...and we go to other schools and play them... and we had like little games during lunch and stuff (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

In addition to playing minor games, badminton and floor hockey in elementary PE, Amy also remembered playing lacrosse in middle school PE. She explained that *[she] liked playing lacrosse*. When I enquired if lacrosse was a new activity for her at the time she said, *yeah I think so* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

When I asked Amy about the variety in course content in elementary school PE, she told me that the emphasis was mostly on games rather than on sports or fitness and that she enjoyed this focus: *I liked it mostly when we played games, I wasn't really big on like a lot of the sports like soccer* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). I asked her why she did not enjoy the sports as much and she explained, *I'm not really good at a lot of sports and some sports I just don't really like* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). When I asked her if she remembered any dance in elementary school PE, she replied, *we might have done dance. I remember always not liking it, so we probably did it in elementary school too* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). She did remember dance as part of the middle school PE curriculum and did not enjoy that portion of the course. When I asked her if there was anything she did not enjoy about the structure of middle school PE, she replied, *um, I don't know, just some things...like the dances we learned I didn't really like* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). Amy explained that the course content focus shifted from mostly games in elementary school PE to a concentration on

team sports in middle school PE. When I asked about the difference between elementary and middle school PE, Amy simply said, *more sports*. She explained that they spent *about the same amount of time on each sport* and that the focus was largely on *team sports* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

When discussing the course content, Amy told me that the students had some choice in the activities offered during elementary and middle school PE, but that the decisions were mostly teacher-driven: *I think some days we got to choose and other days the teacher would be like, “okay we’re doing this today”* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

Amy had touched on her perceived competence when discussing the sports in elementary school PE, but after discussing the elementary PE course content in more depth, I asked her to discuss physical competence further: *Um, I was really good at floor hockey because I played hockey [outside of school], but soccer I wasn’t always really good at, but I was also okay at basketball*. I then enquired further about dance as she had previously mentioned a dislike of dance. I asked her to clarify if she simply disliked it or if she did not feel skilled in it and she responded, *I just don’t really like it* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). Amy’s level of perceived physical competence remained consistent as she moved from elementary to middle school PE. I asked her how good she felt at the team sports in middle school PE and she explained that *[she] was okay at them* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). Amy clarified that she felt skilled at the same activities that she felt competent in during elementary school.

After discussing course content and competency, the topic of the learning environment in Amy’s early PE experiences emerged. She described her elementary PE learning environment in a positive light: *It was enthusiastic definitely. Cause you know, we were kids, and we’re always enthusiastic about a lot of things...we’re learning other things that aren’t like math or science or*

something, so we're playing games pretty much for us (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). When I asked in what way her elementary teachers contributed to this positive learning environment, Amy responded, *they were happy about it. They were calm if we didn't listen really* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). However, Amy felt a little different about the learning environment in middle school PE. I enquired about how the learning environment differed in middle school in comparison to elementary: *It was a little less enthusiastic, and if we didn't listen the teacher would get a little bit less calm...Their tone would change* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). Amy did mention that there were positive aspects of the learning environment in middle school PE. She explained that sometimes the teacher would arrange the teams for the various activities, and other days the students had the opportunity to form their own teams. She felt that this combination helped to facilitate the students working together.

As for assessment in her early PE experiences, Amy recalled that it was *mostly just participation* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). I clarified that this meant that basically if they were running around and playing the game that they received a decent mark and she responded, *Yeah* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). When I prompted her further to see if she could recall any other aspect of assessment in either elementary or middle school PE, she repeated her earlier statement, *mostly just participation* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

Once Amy reached high school, she enrolled in the regular co-educational PE program in grade 9. I asked Amy to think back three years and recall her experiences in the PE 9 class. She responded first with discussion of the course content: *Um, they were okay. We didn't really do a lot of games, sometimes we'd play like benchball or dodgeball, but it was mostly sports and runs.* I asked Amy if she liked or disliked this activity structure and she replied, *I don't like running. Some of the sports were okay, but I didn't like running* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

Amy explained that the teacher largely determined the activities in PE 9 and the focus was mostly on team sports and fitness. I asked if the runs were the main fitness activity and she nodded and added, *and we'd [also] do like the BEEP test and fitness training* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). Amy, as in most of the interview, preferred to offer short responses when I inquired about PE 9. However, I prompted further on the topics of course content and her perceived physical competence in her first year of high school PE. She told me that she felt somewhat skilled in football, *but in grade 9 [they] didn't do floor hockey or anything* – a sport that she felt skilled in during previous PE experiences. I asked Amy to think back and try to remember all of the activities they did in PE 9. She remembered, *basketball, soccer, football, rugby, I think baseball, and I think lacrosse were the sports we did*. She also mentioned that they ran once a week *on the double blocks* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012) and that they participated in a week or two of dance. When I asked if these were all of the activities covered during the course, Amy nodded.

I asked Amy next about her feelings on the learning environment in the co-ed PE 9 program. She replied *...more focused on what we did and a different tone definitely, especially if we were being loud* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). She then clarified that the learning environment was more *serious* than her previous PE learning environments.

Amy explained that assessment in PE 9 relied once again mostly on participation, but that her performances on runs were also assessed: *You had to get a certain time for runs and if you didn't do the run you'd have to re-do it or if you didn't get a certain time, you'd have to re-do it sometimes*. As Amy had mentioned numerous times her dislike of running, I asked if her grade dropped because of her performance on runs and she responded, *yeah, it really did (laughing)* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012). Amy also mentioned that she completed tests on the

sports they covered in PE 9 and that the results on these tests also attributed to part of her grade. She explained that there were *questions about how the game was set-up or how the sport was set-up...the roles...* on these tests. When I asked if she felt this form of assessment was fair she responded, *it was fair; it lets the teacher know what you learned from it* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

4.3.2 Current PE experiences. After co-ed PE 9, Amy enrolled in GAL twice in grade 10, and again in her current grade 11 year. Amy readily offered why she has taken GAL three times:

Cause the first time I took it in grade 10, it was the same semester, but I broke my arm in November... So I had to do it again, and now, I failed that one because I didn't really show up a lot of the time, so I'm doing it again (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7, 2012).

Amy and I's discussion then moved to her current experiences in GAL and how they compared to her previous experiences in elementary, middle, and co-educational high school PE. She explained that GAL is *kind of like elementary and middle school, but a little different because it's still a little bit more serious, but also relaxed and fun* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7), 2012). I asked Amy if she could explain the learning environment of GAL further; I inquired about what it *felt like* to be in the class. She explained: *Some days it's nice if you like what we're doing that day, it's nice to do, but some days it's like some things you don't want to do, but you end up kind of having fun* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7). Amy and I then progressed on to discussing the course content in GAL and how it compared to her previous experiences in PE: *Instead of running we go on like walks and we go on field trips and we do fun games. We do some sports, but they're more just like little warm up games, and sometimes we'll get into games for a few minutes at a time.* I then asked Amy if games were a large focus

in GAL then and she shook/nodded her head in a ‘sort of’ fashion and said, *it’s more fitness, like keeping up your heart rate and stuff. Keeping healthy I suppose* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7). I then asked Amy about the amount of student versus teacher choice in the activities offered in GAL: *We get to choose where we go for field trips, most of the time, like she’ll put some of the things, but she chooses the activities...but we all kind of as one decide where we’re going to go for field trips.* Amy explained that GAL has participated in a number of field trips: *Swimming, skating, they went rock climbing, (thinking) what other things do we do...bowling...* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7). Following up on the list of field trips, I inquired about the variety of activities offered in GAL. Amy explained that there is a large variety of activities offered in GAL. She explained the structure of activities to me: *...yeah we usually do like one a day for some sports, and sometimes we focus a little bit more on them, like two days at most.* This was in comparison to PE 9 where *[they’d] do sports for a week...depending on if [they] were outside or inside which week* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

I then prompted Amy to discuss her perceived level of physical competency in the activities in GAL. She explained that she felt *pretty good* at most of the activities offered. She especially enjoyed *four-corner soccer*, an indoor version of soccer that has four teams and goals. However she felt *not skilled (laughing)* at *yoga and Pilates*. When I asked if she still enjoyed these activities despite feeling a lack of competence in them, she responded, *(shaking her head) no, I don’t really like them (laughing)* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

I asked Amy to apply an emotional word to describe the learning environment in GAL and she responded, *calm, but kind of serious because she wants us to listen and learn how to do it properly* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7). I then inquired about the unique feature of the learning environment in GAL; the fact that it is a girls-only course. I asked Amy if this feature

changes the learning environment of PE for her and she responded, *Yeah*. When I prompted further, she explained, *Um, I think it's more comfortable*. I asked her if she had a problem with the co-ed environment in PE 9 and she replied, *yeah because [guys would] excel at a lot of things, and they'd just be more...what's the word?* I suggested, *dominant maybe?* Amy agreed, *Yeah*. I enquired if there were any negative consequences of being part of an all-girls PE class such as with cliques, and Amy shook her head no. She told me that there was *not really* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7) any negative talk amongst the girls.

Amy explained that Ms. Litto helped to create this positive learning environment in GAL by having the girls participate in teambuilding exercises. When I asked Amy if the students or Ms. Litto arranged the groups for the teambuilding activities, she explained that sometimes the students chose the groups and sometimes Ms. Litto chose them, in Amy's words, *just to get us more spread out and with different people* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

As for assessment in GAL, Amy told me it is similar to what it was in elementary and middle school PE: participation. When I asked her if her grade in GAL was based on anything other than participation, she responded *um...nope* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

In talking to Amy and Ms. Litto, I learned that Amy is currently trying to receive her grade 10 (mandatory) PE credit because she failed GAL 10 last year due to her lack of attendance. However, she told me that she plans to take GAL again next year, in her grade 12 year, as an elective course: *I do like doing PE so I'm probably going to do it next year as well* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7). I inquired about any changes between this year and last as she is now finding success in GAL. Amy explained, *Um...I'm actually going to school more*. Amy had a problem with attending school in general in the past. Amy said that she would take

GAL again next year rather than co-ed PE because she likes it and *it'll get [her] more active* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

When observing Amy in class I noticed that she had one friend in GAL that she most often chatted and participated with. I inquired about her other friends' opinions of PE: *Some of them don't really like it.* Amy explained that her friends do not really talk about why they do not like PE. I then asked if any of her friends were enrolled in PE and she said, *Um...they are I think, I know Chloe who's in my class is.* Chloe is enrolled in GAL with Amy and when I asked if any of her friends were enrolled in co-educational PE she said *no.* The reasons Amy provided to why her and her friends chose GAL over regular PE were: *No running. It's also a lot more fun* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

4.3.3 Physical activity outside of PE. Amy explained that her main source of exercise outside of PE consists of walking. She told me that she had no outside inspiration to continue in GAL, that it was simply a personal decision: *Um...no, I just like it sometimes* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7). Amy stated further that she did not discuss her decision to continue with family or friends and that it was just a personal decision. I then asked Amy if any aspect of GAL has inspired her to become active outside of school: *Um...kind of...I know I'm going to like rock climbing when we go; it's something I'm going to want to do* (Interview Transcript #1 – Nov. 7).

4.4 Amy: Narrative Analysis

What struck me most about Amy during our conversations is how *her face and eyes came alive when she talked about participating in fun minor games in both elementary [school PE] and GAL. It makes me wonder if she longs for innocence; a second childhood* (Field note - Nov. 7). Despite the fact that she used to play competitive hockey outside of school, within PE, Amy explained that she enjoys activities that are recreational and fun rather than competitive.

Although she mentioned fitness activities, it was the *fun games* that she seemed to value throughout her past PE experiences and currently in GAL. As for the rest of the course content in GAL, Amy expressed that she disliked participating in dance, Pilates, and yoga. Although these activities make up a large portion of the GAL curriculum, Amy still really enjoys the course and plans to sign up for it again next year. This suggests that perhaps the games offered and the general learning environment in GAL are more important to Amy than the focus on lifetime fitness activities.

In our discussions of PE learning environments, it became clear that Amy defined a positive learning environment by the demeanor of the teacher. She constantly referred to her teachers as *calm* or *less calm* in her descriptions of the learning environments. This illustrates the large role her PE teachers could play in creating a welcoming and comfortable learning environment. Amy was really fond of the learning environments in elementary school PE because of the *fun games* and the *calm* atmosphere. She compared the learning environment of elementary school PE to GAL because she said it is also *relaxed* and *fun*; however, she also described it as *a little bit more serious* because there are high expectations of her as a participant in the course.

When it came to assessment in Girls Actively Living, it was Amy's perception that it was based wholly on participation. This perception of assessment was fairly consistent throughout her past PE experiences as well. However, in talking to Ms. Litto I learned that the girls are also assessed on a few assignments, one example being a Create-a-Dance project where they are required to create, practice, and perform their own dances. Despite not remembering all of the assignments, Amy still described the assessment in GAL as *fair*. Therefore, Amy feels it is fair to be assessed fully on participation in this tailored elective PE course.

4.5 Kennedy: A Narrative Account

Kennedy is seventeen years old and in her final year of high school. She is tall with shoulder length dirty blonde hair. She appears well put together; her hair is straightened and her make-up is flawless. Every time I see Kennedy, she is surrounded by a gaggle of girls. She is popular within GAL and school in general.

Our first interview was on Halloween. When I saw Kennedy in the hall before the interview she was not in costume although all her friends were. She told me that she did not mind missing the pumpkin carving contest they were doing in GAL that day in order to have the interview. However, she did ask me how long I believed the interview would take as she was trying to arrange a ride home after school. When we sat down in the interview room, and before I started the recorder, I told her that everything she said would remain confidential. Although I had never taught Kennedy before, I knew of her taking PE 10 in the same block in which I taught a different class, so I felt the need to specifically state that I would not be sharing details with the other PE teachers. I made it clear that my role as interviewer was separate from my role as a teacher at the school.

During the interview Kennedy appeared fairly uncomfortable. She looked down at her hands often, provided short answers despite my prompting, and did not take any snacks despite the fact that I offered them often. I felt a sense of urgency (it was only a 21 minute interview) as though she wanted to get out of the meeting room as soon as possible. However, near the end of the interview, she did tell me that she wanted more time to think about her past PE experiences. When I brought the interview transcript back to her a week after the interview, she spent some time with the transcript and was able to add further details and memories of her experiences in elementary and middle school PE.

4.5.1 Past PE experiences. Kennedy had a really difficult time remembering details from elementary school, she said, *it was a long time ago* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). However, she could recall some details about the course content. I asked her what activities she remembered participating in during elementary and middle school PE and she responded:

Just like...minor games, and like baseball, soccer, cross country... I ran cross country when I was younger...in elementary (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012)

I just remember track and field things like long jump, high jump and all that stuff...Track and field I just loved, I don't know why (laughing) (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012)

Once Kennedy had some time to reflect after the interview, she could recall further details about the course content in elementary school PE:

Also in elementary we had a big unit for gymnastics and we would bring out the gymnastic equipment for a class (Member Check Comment – Dec. 20th, 2012).

We would have a game called 'no touch ground tag' in elementary where we would play tag on the playground and wouldn't touch the ground (Member Check Comment – Dec. 20th, 2012).

Kennedy often discussed extra-curricular intramurals, exploratories (an intramural type organization at the local middle school), or school team sports when asked about PE in elementary or middle school:

We would travel to the other elementary schools in grade 5 basketball and would often win ☺ (Member Check Comment – Dec. 20th, 2012).

When we were in middle school we also had exploratories, which offered things like volleyball and extra physical activities (Member Check Comment – Dec. 20th, 2012).

When I further prompted about elementary school PE, Kennedy stated, *that's all I really remember from there* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). I asked her if she could remember anything from elementary PE that she disliked, and she responded, *not really. I liked PE all the way through school pretty much* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). We focused mostly on middle school from then on as she could remember further details about her time in PE starting in grade 6. For example, during the interview she remembered three specific activities that were a part of her middle school PE curriculum: *Um...soccer, um...schlocky...we had tether ball and all that stuff...it's so hard to remember that far back* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Despite struggling to remember further course content specifics during the interview, Kennedy, upon reflection, was able to provide further memories on her member check transcript:

Middle school we would go for runs down Revello Road which I didn't mind they would always bring us out on sunny days (Member Check Comment – Dec. 20th, 2012).

Sometimes in middle school we would have obstacle course type set ups and get into teams and we would have relays (Member Check Comment – Dec. 20th, 2012).

While we were on the topic of course content in her early PE experiences, I asked Kennedy about student versus teacher choice in the activities. Kennedy responded: *Um, we had units...and sometimes we got to choose [the activity] on odd days*. When I asked Kennedy how this choice occurred, she answered, *mostly on the day* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). I then prompted Kennedy to discuss the variety within the course content during middle school PE. She explained that *there was kind of a lot. Just like something different every week* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy then went onto clarify the categories of activities they participated in during middle school PE: *We did a lot of dance, I remember that and...there was a lot of team sports too, like when we did soccer, or four corner, and sometimes we'd do*

volleyball...sometimes we played soccer outside. I can't really remember the outdoor ones....sometimes California Kickball (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

After Kennedy and I discussed course content, I asked her how competent she felt at the various activities. She explained that she felt pretty competent *cause [she] was tall and like basketball and stuff was easy* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). I then went on to ask her if there were any activities that she did not feel as competent in and she responded: *Football probably...sometimes we did ultimate Frisbee. Kennedy said that she was also pretty good (laughing)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012) at ultimate Frisbee. It was clear that Kennedy remembered feeling physically competent in the vast majority of PE activities offered in elementary and middle school.

Kennedy and I then moved on to discussing the learning environment in middle school PE. Kennedy described the feeling of the class as positive because *[she] had a lot of friends in it all the time. And the teachers were nice all the time* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). However, Kennedy could not remember anything further about the learning environment in middle school PE, such as if the teachers had any grouping strategies to encourage the students to work together or not.

Kennedy had just as much difficulty remembering assessment in middle school PE as she did the learning environment. When I asked her about grading, she responded, *I can't even remember if we had grades in middle school* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). When I prompted further, she stated that she believed the assessment in middle school PE was mostly effort based. Kennedy was comfortable with how she was assessed because *PE was never really that bad for [her]* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Once Kennedy entered high school, she enrolled in mandatory co-educational PE in both grades 9 and 10. When I began the discussion of high school PE with Kennedy, she explained that her experiences during PE 9 and 10 were *um...pretty good* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). She told me that the course content in co-ed PE *was always fun...except for the runs (laughing)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy went on to explain that the activities were *mostly just planned out by two weeks or whatever* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012) and the activities were chosen *mostly by the teacher* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). She said there was some sense of student choice on certain occasions: *Sometimes, if it was like a casual day we'd go on walks or something, but we'd get to choose where* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Kennedy also had some difficulty remembering the details of her junior high school PE experiences just as she had with middle and elementary school. When I asked her about the variety in PE 9 and 10 activities, she responded: *We did a lot of different things like football, volleyball...um...I can't remember really...we did mostly sports* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). When discussing Kennedy's perception of physical competence in these various sports, Kennedy's response mimicked many of her previous responses: *Um...pretty good. Except the runs...I did not like them (laughing)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). As Kennedy had mentioned many times her strong dislike of the mandatory weekly runs in co-ed PE, I decided to follow up further. I asked her if she simply did not like running or if it was something else: *Well I don't know, I do it at home by myself, but I just don't like it when it's with a group....I don't know you just feel like you're, I don't know, slaking more because you're talking to your friends or whatever...so you don't really put the effort in* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Kennedy explained that, away from the runs, she felt pretty competent in the rest of the activities. Specifically, she told me that volleyball *was pretty easy and badminton's fun* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

When it came to discussing the learning environment in her grade 9 and 10 PE classes, Kennedy offered short responses. She labeled the learning environment as *pretty good* and *cooperative* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Similar to middle school, Kennedy based the positive learning environment in PE 9 and 10 on the fact that she *had lots of friends in those classes too* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). However, different than our discussions of elementary and middle school, Kennedy could recall specific strategies that her teachers used to encourage the members of the class to work together: *They'd put us into groups that we didn't usually work with*. She said she liked working with new students *cause it's good to know everybody in the class* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Just as Kennedy could only recall few details about assessment in elementary and middle school PE, she also remembered little about assessment in PE 9 and 10. When I asked her about grading she responded, *it was average like C+s and Bs*. As it was obvious that Kennedy interpreted my question as how she personally did in PE 9 and 10 I then asked her how these grades were decided and she responded, *probably effort*. Other than daily effort marks, Kennedy could recall one specific assessment tool used in PE 9 and 10: *The BEEP test*. When I asked her thoughts on this form of assessment, she responded, *I didn't like it at all* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

4.5.2 Current PE experiences. Kennedy enrolled in GAL last year, in grade 11, and also currently in her grade 12 year. As PE is no longer mandatory after grade 10, I asked her to explain why she elected to enroll in GAL: *Well I heard that you have to have like 120 hours [of*

physical activity] or something for graduation...so I wanted to get that in, and because it's fun, just like a fun class to be in. I asked her if she discussed her decision with anyone and she responded, *not really, I just wanted to be in it again, cause it is my last year...and my friends were going into it as well.* As Kennedy had mentioned having her friends in the various PE classes throughout her years at school, I enquired if having friends in the course is a deciding factor for her or not and she answered, *not really, because it's still fun* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy told me later in the interview that she did discuss her decision to enroll in GAL again with her mom, who was supportive of Kennedy making the decision for herself.

Although Kennedy discussed her elementary, middle, and early high school PE experiences in a relatively positive light, when I asked her to compare her current experiences in GAL, she said, *its way better; its way more fun. We do a lot of other things outside of school* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy explained that there was a large variety in the activities in GAL and that the students had some sense of choice in the content: *Um...sometimes [Ms. Litto] asks like if we want to go swimming or skating cause they're both at the same place...or if you want to go on a walk or stay inside and do something (silence), but usually we're outside for an amount of time and inside for an amount of time* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy described the activities in GAL as *pretty recreational* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy explained that she felt *pretty good* at the various activities in GAL, and when I asked her to discuss her perceived physical competence further, she said she felt more confident in the activities offered in GAL than she had in co-ed PE. When I prompted her to describe the variety in activities further, she remembered participating in a dance unit and a lot of teambuilding activities. According to Kennedy, these teambuilding

activities helped encourage the class to work together: *Well at the beginning of the unit we just all got like in a circle and told everybody our names and stuff. Just like at the beginning of the year – like getting to know everybody.* I asked her if there is still a problem with cliques within the course: *Um...there still is but it just depends on like who you are as a person, if you want to be like around those people I guess...I get along with everybody so it's not really a problem (smiling)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy also explained further grouping strategies that her teacher in GAL uses to encourage the girls to work together: *... we work together as teams a lot. Usually we are just put in groups. Sometimes we choose [the groups], but usually because there's a lot of German exchange students in the class, [Ms. Litto] usually wants them all split up* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

The largest difference between GAL and her earlier high school PE experiences that Kennedy described was the learning environment: *...we work a lot more together cause it's all girls...and...you just, I don't know, you end up getting along better...I feel like everyone wants to work harder when there's no guys around* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). When I asked further about the learning environment, Kennedy described the environment in GAL as *easier* than co-ed PE. I asked Kennedy to elaborate and she said, *cause we all get along* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). I then asked about any similarities between GAL and her co-ed PE experiences and she replied, *you still work hard and stuff and have to put effort into everything...just as much as I did in PE* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Kennedy did not have too much to say regarding the assessment in GAL. She explained that it was fairly consistent with her previous experiences in PE; based mostly on effort: *Just like how you, you come to PE on time with your strip and stuff, and effort* (Interview Transcript –

Oct. 31st, 2012). I asked her if she had any problems with how she is assessed in GAL and she replied, *not really, it's all pretty fair* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

As Kennedy mentioned her friends a few times throughout the interview, I asked her about their opinions of PE: *I think half of them just go in it because they're put in it...and don't get switched out probably...but last year was different, I think lots of people wanted to sign up for it.* Away from her friends that are enrolled in GAL with her, Kennedy did not believe any of her friends enrolled in the regular, co-educational stream of PE. She believed that her friends who enrolled in PE *like it* and when I asked what she believed the reasons were for girls not enrolling in PE, she explained, *just cause they don't, I don't know, some of them probably just don't like to go in it at school...lots of them do it on their own time* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). This comment led Kennedy and I to begin a conversation about physical activity outside of physical education.

4.5.3 Physical activity outside of PE. Kennedy lives in a really remote area; it takes her one hour on the school bus to get to school and if there is any extreme weather (rain, snow, or wind), the students that live in this area must board the bus early and leave school as there is a risk that the accessing roads will be closed. The positive side of this location, for Kennedy, is the outdoor activities it offers. She told me that she likes to kayak, hike, and surf outside of school. I asked her if any of these physical experiences in nature influenced her decision to continue in PE and she responded, *not really, it was just something that I wanted to do...[but] sort of, because Girls Actively Living goes out a lot...like on the double blocks we do other things* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012). Kennedy was also inspired to add a further activity to her repertoire because she tried it in GAL: *I really want to go rock climbing! That was like the funnest thing ever!* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Following up on our discussion of other girls, I asked Kennedy what she believed other girls' opinions of physical activity in general are: *Hmmm, yeah most of my friends like to be active...but they go to the gym a lot (laughing)* (Interview Transcript – Oct. 31st, 2012).

Kennedy told me that she was not much into working out at the gym, she preferred participating in physical activities in nature – nature is her gym.

4.6 Kennedy: Narrative Analysis

Throughout our conversations on her past PE experiences, Kennedy often described extra-curricular sports or intramural activities instead of experiences within PE. It appeared to me that she blended all of her early physical activity experiences and could not distinguish curricular from extra-curricular. However, this changed as soon as she began discussions on high school; Kennedy no longer described physical activities that occurred within school, but outside of PE. This could be due to the fact that she remembers her recent PE experiences a lot more clearly or that she no longer participated in school PA outside of PE upon entering high school.

Through our discussions it first seemed as though Kennedy judged her PE learning environments by if she had friends in the course with her or not. Whenever I questioned her about the learning environments within elementary and middle school PE, she described the environments in a favourable light because she *had lots of friends in those classes*. However, although friends seemed really important to Kennedy for creating a positive PE learning environment, she said that she would enroll in GAL even if none of her friends did. This suggests that the general learning environment of GAL, created by her classmates and teacher, is more important to Kennedy than having friends in the course.

Kennedy, at one point in our conversations, also described the learning environment in GAL as *easy*. As a past teacher of the course I had always been insulted when GAL was described as the “easier PE.” I have always been curious about why students describe certain courses as “easy” even when they are not excelling in the course. Kennedy’s response that GAL is *easy* because all the girls *get along* suggests that perhaps a limited vocabulary made Kennedy describe the environment as “easy” rather than “relaxed” or “welcoming”.

Kennedy could remember very little about assessment in PE. However, one of the few specific examples she could recall was having her cardiovascular endurance assessed using the BEEP test in co-ed PE. Kennedy certainly emphasized that she did not like this particular test *at all*. The BEEP test is also known as the pacer test or a shuttle run test. The PE teachers at Hemery High School use it to assess cardiovascular endurance during a fitness testing week. As students are assessed on all of the components of fitness during this week, I thought it was interesting that Kennedy mentioned only the running test. This was consistent with her dislike of being assessed on the weekly runs. It seems as though Kennedy disliked the public nature of these assessments – the fact that others could watch as she publicly exerted herself to try for a better time.

4.7 Threads Across the Narrative Accounts

In addition to the specific features of the stories of these three young women, I detected some shared areas of content. Within my narrative inquiry process, I looked across the individual narratives to inquire into threads that could be discerned from the stories of these girls’ experiences in PE. As I moved to look across the narratives, I left the intimate relationship between myself as researcher with each youth participant. The relationships shifted to ones

across the experiences of the three girls in the tailored elective PE course. In this shift I wanted to offer a deeper and broader awareness of the experiences of these girls in elective PE. My aim in presenting these shared threads is to consider what is common to their experiences as well as how each girl's experience may also have been shaped by sharing a common context, Girls Actively Living.

From September 2012 through June 2013, I worked with the participants and the narratives to ensure I had not privileged my understandings of the stories over those of the participants. In July and August 2013, I reviewed all of the completed narratives to look for threads across the experiences of the girls. I read the narratives through a number of times while keeping in mind my research questions regarding the course content, learning environment, and assessment in GAL as well as the girls' experiences outside of PE and their perceptions of PA in general. Narrative themes for each participant were developed and commonalities and differences across all three narratives were noted. While initially I identified a number of threads, as I worked with them I realized there were many intersections and overlaps and I could best represent the complexities of the narratives in relation to the research questions in four threads. This next section explores these four threads:

1. "Then the next day's something different...it's a surprise": Variety and Cooperation within Course Content
2. "It's okay to be weird and have fun": A Fun and Welcoming Learning Environment
3. "It's all pretty fair": Fair and Private Assessment
4. "It just boosts up my ability and confidence": Confidence, Social Safety, and Competence

In this section, I elaborate on each thread as a way to better understand the experiences of these three adolescent girls in a tailored elective PE course.

4.7.1 “Then the next day’s something different...it’s a surprise”: Variety and cooperation within course content. The girls’ discussions on the value of having a wide variety of cooperative lifetime activities in the PE course content rather than competitive physical activities framed this thread. This thread figured prominently in their narratives. The girls seemed to define cooperative activities as individual or group activities that did not require competing against others for goals, points, or time. Whereas, they described competitive activities as either invasion team sports which have an aim of beating the opponent, or individual activities such as running that required the girls to race against classmates. It was clear that course content was foremost in their minds during their stories of elementary, middle and high school PE as well as in their current experiences in GAL. This thread is organized temporally; discussion is arranged starting with the girls’ experiences of elementary PE course content to middle school and early high school PE and concluding with a discussion of their experiences with the course content in GAL. Within the discussion of each stage in PE, topics of variety, competition and lifelong activities will be explored.

Despite the narrowed variety of activities the girls described offered in elementary PE, Willow, Amy, and Kennedy, for the most part, found enjoyment in the course content:

Willow: ...in elementary [PE] we used to play volleyball all the time and ah, soccer, and basketball, and all kind of fun sports.

Amy: We played lots of really fun games.

Kennedy: Just like...minor games, and like baseball, soccer, cross country... I ran cross country when I was younger...in elementary.

The girls explained that they only participated in sports and minor games in elementary school PE, but because of the relaxed nature of these activities, the girls described having fun while participating. This suggests that although there were not a large variety of activities offered, nor were the activities necessarily classified as lifetime activities, because they were of a cooperative nature rather than competitive, the girls remembered them in a favourable light.

Whereas Willow and Kennedy seemed to enjoy the majority of the PE course content throughout school, there were aspects of the curriculum that Amy did not enjoy in middle school:

Amy: I wasn't really big on like a lot of the sports like soccer.

Amy: ...like the dances we learned I didn't really like.

Amy further explained there was a large focus on team sports in the middle school PE course content and a limited variety in activities offered overall: *There was basketball, soccer, football, rugby, I think baseball, and I think lacrosse were the sports we did.*

Once in high school, the three girls shared a commonality in their experiences with the co-ed PE course content. Willow, Kennedy and Amy all expressed a strong dislike of running. It was an aspect of their junior year(s) in high school PE that they did not enjoy and was an activity they were minimizing by enrolling in GAL:

Willow: [In GAL] we do...a lot of fun games, and we don't run as much.

Amy: [PE 9] was mostly sports and runs... I don't like running... Some of the sports were okay, but I didn't like running.

Amy: Instead of running [in GAL] we go on like walks and we go on field trips and we do fun games.

Kennedy: [PE 9 and 10 were] always fun...except for the runs (laughing).

The girls spoke favourably of the variety of activities offered within GAL. Although the girls enjoyed the PE course content in past years, variety was a highlight of GAL that they had not previously experienced:

Willow: ...different everyday... Ms. Litto has a chart by her office like today we we're doing badminton, and then the next day I don't know what we're doing, but we're doing something... and then the next day's something different, and the next day's something different...it's a surprise.

Amy: Instead of running we go on like walks and we go on field trips and we do fun games. We do some sports, but they're more just like little warm up games, and sometimes we'll get into games for a few minutes at a time.

Amy: Swimming, skating, they went rock climbing, (thinking) what other things do we do...bowling...

Amy: Um...yeah we usually do like one a day for some sports, and sometimes we focus a little bit more on them, like two days at most.

Kennedy: We do a lot of other things outside of school.

Kennedy: because Girls Actively Living goes out a lot...like on the double blocks we do other things.

In particular, all three girls spoke positively of the weekly field trips offered in GAL as these were a source of variety not previously offered to them in PE. When asked about activities they experienced in GAL that they would like to pursue outside of school, both Amy and Kennedy mentioned a specific field trip:

Amy: I know I'm going to like rock climbing when we go; it's something I'm going to want to do.

Kennedy: *I really want to go rock climbing! That was like the funnest thing ever!*

In their discussions of the type of activities offered in GAL, the girls spoke of both the lifetime nature of the activities as well as the fact that they were more cooperative than competitive. When asked to describe the course content of GAL, Amy explained that *it's more fitness, like keeping up your heart rate and stuff. Keeping healthy I suppose.* This was in contrast to the focus on competitive team sports that she described in middle and co-educational high school PE. All of the girls communicated the relaxed learning environment in GAL (discussed further in the next section) and along with this, they defined the cooperative nature of the activities offered. Kennedy labeled the activities as *pretty recreational* and described cooperative teambuilding activities the class participated in regularly.

4.7.2 “It’s okay to be weird and have fun”: A fun and welcoming learning environment. The girls told many stories of the learning environments they experienced throughout their years in PE. This thread encompasses the following topics: having fun, the impact of friends in PE, co-educational versus segregated PE, and the role of the teacher in creating a positive learning environment.

Although the girls’ responses varied on the PE learning environments they experienced throughout their schooling, having fun was a consistent topic that emerged. The PE learning environments in elementary school were described as *fun* (Willow) and *enthusiastic* (Amy). Whereas the PE environments in middle school and co-educational high school were defined as *less enthusiastic* and *less calm* by Amy, but still *fun* and *warm* by Willow and *pretty good* and *cooperative* by Kennedy. Although their opinions ranged on their past PE learning environments, they shared a similar opinion on the fun atmosphere in GAL. When asked to compare GAL to her previous PE learning environments, Willow had the following to say:

... [GAL] makes me more confident because the people in there that are nice to me and they know me well enough that I can be weird sometimes (laughing) that it's okay to be weird and have fun.

The topic of fun also arose in Amy's comparison of the GAL learning environment to her previous PE learning environments: *[GAL is] kind of like elementary and middle school, but a little different because it's still a little bit more serious, but also relaxed and fun.* Likewise, Kennedy's comparison also included the topic of fun; she simply stated that GAL is *way better; it's way more fun* than her previous PE classes.

Having friends in PE was another topic that ensued in my discussions with the girls. The impact of having friends in the PE class on the learning environment differed for each girl. For Willow, it was less about having friends in the course than having nice classmates who did not bully her. In middle school PE, Willow stated that her classmates *liked each other and respected each other and stuff like that.* However, *there was about 4 or 5 kids that were pretty ignorant and self-centered* who bullied Willow during the activities. Whereas in GAL, she has found a safe and welcoming learning environment because the girls, although not her friends per se, are kind to her and allow her to be herself: *... the people in [GAL] that are nice to me and they know me well enough that I can be weird sometimes (laughing) that it's okay to be weird and have fun.* When asked specifically about the impact of having friends in the class on her choice to enroll, Willow stated: *It doesn't matter...they can have a choice of what class they want, it's not what I want, it's...what they want, it's their choice because it's school.* Also, one of Willow's close friends decided to enroll in the co-educational senior PE class, but this did not impact Willow's decision to go into GAL: *I asked Amanda if she wanted to be in [GAL] with me, but she said, "I'm good, and I want to be in with the other class", and I said "ok", but I went into it anyways.*

For Willow, it was more important to have a safe learning environment with supportive classmates than having close friends in the course.

It appeared that having a friend in the course was quite important to Amy. In my observations of her in GAL, she was always with her one close friend in the class. However, when asked, if she would enroll in the course even if her friends did not, she responded that she would.

The discussion of having friends in her PE class was a topic that arose often in my discussions of PE learning environments with Kennedy. When asked to describe her elementary PE experience she responded that it had a positive learning environment because *[she] had a lot of friends in it all the time. And the teachers were nice all the time.* Similarly she described her middle school and early high school PE learning environments in a positive light because she *had lots of friends in those classes too.* Due to these conversations I had the impression that friends were the largest factor in creating a positive learning environment for Kennedy; however, when I asked her if having friends in the class impacted her decision to enroll in GAL, she responded, *not really, because it's still fun.* It seemed for all three girls that the general learning environment of a PE class was more important than being with their friends.

One factor that seemed to impact the general PE learning environment for the girls was whether or not boys were present in their PE classes. Throughout elementary, middle and early high school all of their PE classes were co-educational. Despite the fact that boys in PE often teased Willow, she still believed that the learning *environment in general* was more important to her than having a segregated PE class. On the other hand, Amy and Kennedy much preferred the segregated learning environment offered in GAL. Amy believed that GAL was more *comfortable* than her previous PE learning environments. She explained that in her past co-

educational PE classes the boys dominated the activities *because they'd excel at a lot of things*. Similarly, Kennedy preferred the girls-only learning environment; she stated: *...we work a lot more together cause it's all girls...and...you just, I don't know, you end up getting along better...I feel like everyone wants to work harder when there's no guys around*.

Perhaps the most dominant topic that arose in this thread was the role of the PE teacher in creating a positive learning environment. Amy in particular defined the learning environment by the tone set by the teacher. When I asked her to describe her elementary PE learning environment, she explained that her teachers were enthusiastic and *calm if [they] didn't listen really*. Once she reached middle school her teachers were less enthusiastic *and if [they] didn't listen the teacher would get a little bit less calm...their tone would change*. Amy said her co-educational high school PE learning environment was the most serious, and was *more focused on what [they] did and a different tone definitely, especially if [they] were being loud*. Amy really favoured the relaxed and enthusiastic learning environment created by her teachers in elementary school PE, and when asked to describe the learning environment in GAL, she explained, *kind of like elementary... calm, but kind of serious because [Ms. Litto] wants us to listen and learn how to do it properly*.

Willow's most positive learning environments were created by one of her middle school teachers and Ms. Litto – both female PE teachers. Willow explained that for her PE was *funner with girl teachers*. Whereas her middle school teacher created a fun and spontaneous learning environment by *pull[ing] things out of her sleeves all the time*, Ms. Litto makes Willow feel safe and supported in GAL because *she knows by [her] past what's happened to [her] and that's why [Willow is] so quiet*. Ms. Litto challenges Willow to become more social in class and this has helped to increase her confidence: *Sometimes I don't really want to work with people, but Ms.*

Litto makes me (laughing) and then I start opening up my eyes pretty much and start talking to people. Kennedy also spoke about Ms. Litto's role in creating GAL's positive learning environment. She discussed how Ms. Litto encourages the girls to work together: *... we work together as teams a lot. Usually we are just put in groups. Sometimes we choose [the groups], but usually because there's a lot of German exchange students in the class, [Ms. Litto] usually wants them all split up.* All three girls illustrated how Ms. Litto encourages them to work with everyone else in the class. These teambuilding activities and grouping strategies may be a reason that the need for friends in the class is not necessary for the girls because they have a social network with all of their classmates in GAL.

4.7.3 “It’s all pretty fair”: **Fair and private assessment.** Although assessment was an area of PE that the girls could remember little about, there were two areas that created this thread, the fact that the girls felt the assessment in GAL was fair and that they valued private assessment rather than having their skills and abilities evaluated on a public platform.

A common topic throughout the girls' discussions of assessment in PE was their perception that it was based mostly on effort and participation. Although Willow and Amy could recall one or two written tests they were given on specific sports, all three girls responded that their grades were based largely on participation throughout elementary, middle, and high school PE. Currently in GAL, all three girls stated that their grade was based fully on daily participation marks:

Willow: [Ms. Litto] does it by 5s on our activity and our... [participation].

Kennedy: Just like how you, you come to PE on time with your strip and stuff, and effort.

When asked, all three girls felt that this form of assessment was fair, suggesting that an effort-based assessment model is meaningful to them in this elective PE course.

All the girls struggled to recall specific assessment tools used in PE. However, all three girls recalled one specific assessment form in middle and co-educational high school PE: running. This public form of assessment, one in which the girls raced for a time and were compared to their peers on a weekly basis, was one all three girls very much disliked. Willow identified the weekly run assessments as the main reason why she elected to enroll in GAL instead of co-educational PE. Amy described the weekly runs on which she was assessed in PE 9: *You had to get a certain time for runs and if you didn't do the run you'd have to re-do it or if you didn't get a certain time, you'd have to re-do it sometimes.* Due to Amy's lack of competence in running and her dislike of this public form of assessment, her grade in the course plummeted. Similarly, Kennedy, who spoke very fondly of PE activities in general, mentioned her dislike of being assessed on running numerous times throughout the interview. I asked her if she really disliked running and she explained:

I do it home by myself, but I just don't like it when it's with a group...you just feel like you're, I don't know, slacking more because you're talking to your friends or whatever...so you don't really put the effort in.

Interestingly, it was not the activity itself that Kennedy disliked, but the public and social atmosphere of the assessment. Finally, both Kennedy and Amy also recalled another public form of assessment from their time in co-educational high school PE, the BEEP test. This running test was part of fitness testing week where the girls were asked to pace themselves over a 20-metre distance. Since there are different scores for boys and girls, the boys were able to watch while the girls exerted themselves.

4.7.4 “It just boosts up my ability and confidence”: Confidence, social safety, and competence. This thread speaks to the cyclical relationship between confidence, social safety,

and competence the girls currently experience in GAL. Whereas Kennedy's feelings of confidence, social safety, and physical competence stayed relatively consistent throughout her years in PE, Willow and Amy experienced times when they lacked confidence, competence and the feeling of being emotionally safe with their peers in middle and co-educational high school PE. For Amy, the largely competitive team sport emphasis of middle and early high school PE did not support her need for competence, social safety, and confidence, because she believes *[she is] not really good at a lot of sports*. However, GAL allows the girls to feel socially safe due to the previously discussed welcoming learning environment, so they are able to work hard to improve their skills, therefore increasing their perceived physical competence and in turn, their confidence to participate in class. Willow's comment spoke to this cycle:

...a couple of years ago I was way over weight for my age I was about like 14 and I was like almost 200 pounds. And ever since I started [GAL]...I lost a lot of weight...I like running past people now.

The confidence Willow has gained in GAL has also influenced her activity outside of school: *I'd be able to go walk to the beach on my own... because I've walked down to [the beach] from my place*. Since Willow feels that GAL is a place where she is safe from bullying, her confidence and physical competence have increased as she has become a more active individual.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of three girls who chose to continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. This chapter will delve further into the threads from the findings and connect them to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter will conclude with implications for PE teachers and future directions for PE researchers.

According to Bruner (1990), the telling of stories is the principal mode through which people make sense of human behaviour, their own and that of others. Through the telling of their stories, the participants in this study described diverse experiences as well as their unique and individual needs in PE. This is one of the contributions of narrative inquiry in revealing how the narratives serve to connect the past, present, and the future. The girls' past PE experiences helped to shape their decision to continue in GAL, and their current experiences in GAL are shaping their future participation in physical activity.

The threads that emerged in this study both support and contradict findings in the literature. Despite the very high number of girls in British Columbia who do not continue to enroll in elective PE (BC Ministry of Education, 2012), Willow, Amy and Kennedy all made the decision to continue in PE. All three of these girls found enjoyment in PE, for the most part, throughout their years of schooling. The next section of this chapter will connect the threads previously discussed with the literature reviewed in chapter 2 and the initial research questions.

5.1 Thread 1: Variety and Cooperation within Course Content

The first thread, *“Then the next day’s something different...it’s a surprise”*: *Variety and cooperation within course content*, tied together the girls' discussions on the variety of activities they experienced during their PE experiences as well as the value they placed on cooperative activities over competitive team sports. The narrative accounts speak clearly to the importance

of variety in PE course content. All three girls spoke favourably of the course content offered during elementary school PE. The British Columbia Physical Education Integrated Resource Package (BC PE IRP) that defines the PE curriculum from kindergarten to grade seven defines five categories in course content: Alternative-Environment Activities, Dance, Individual and Dual Activities, Games and Gymnastics (BC Ministry of Education, 2006). The girls described their experiences with the course content as focused heavily on the Games category as the girls described many of the *fun games* they played. Despite the limited course content the girls described in elementary PE, they recalled the activities in a positive light. They described the games they played in elementary PE as fun and cooperative. So although they did not receive a varied PE curriculum, the fact that the games were perceived as cooperative rather than competitive made PE enjoyable. This finding corroborates the Slater and Tiggemann (2010) study where the female participants identified that activities in elementary school were less competitive in nature and that they found this more enjoyable.

Moving into middle school and high school PE, the British Columbia Integrated Resource Package that defines PE curriculum in grades eight to ten divides the PE course content into three activity categories: Rhythmic Movement, Individual and Dual Activities, and Games (BC Ministry of Education, 2008). Willow, Amy and Kennedy described the course content in middle school and their early co-educational high school PE experiences as once again focused heavily on the Games category, and specifically on team sports. However, unlike the games played during elementary school, these team sports were competitive in nature. This is consistent with literature that found that competitive team sports are predominantly offered in middle and high school PE (Fairclough et al, 2002; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008). Girls in the Slater and Tiggemann (2010) study, similar to the participants in

this study, made a direct comparison between the fun and cooperative activities of elementary school and the competitive nature of the team sports offered at middle and high school: “Some girls mentioned that sports in primary school were less competitive in nature and that they found this more enjoyable: ‘It is more competitive in high school’; ‘It wasn’t competitive, like you didn’t have to try and win, you could just muck around’ (p. 624). The girls within the Slater and Tiggmann (2010) study were dissatisfied with these team sport offerings because it reinforced the traditional stereotypes of girls’ and boys’ activities and provided little relevance to their current or future lifestyles. Whereas Kennedy did not have a problem with the team sport emphasis, Amy expressed that she was *not really good at a lot of sports* and Willow did not enjoy many of the team sports because she was teased and bullied during them. Some researchers argue that an almost exclusive use of team sports in PE is not an effective way to encourage a lifetime of PA because team sports not only require a great deal of organization and large numbers of people, but also account for only a small portion of the activities in which adults actually participate (Corbin, 2002; Fairclough et al, 2002). Therefore, the majority of the activities the girls experienced during elementary, middle and early high school PE could not be considered lifetime activities.

Once in GAL, the girls described the course content consisting of a variety of lifetime activities. These activities included dance, yoga, and Pilates and many other activities from both the Rhythmic Movement and Individual and Dual Activities categories. According to Fairclough et al. (2002), these types of activities are only occasionally offered or ignored altogether in typical PE programs. The authors define lifetime activities as those that may readily be carried over into adulthood because they generally can be pursued individually or with others, require little structure or organization and minimal equipment. In Amy’s words, she described the focus

of activities in GAL as: *its more fitness, like keeping up your heart rate and stuff. Keeping healthy I suppose.*

The weekly field trips the girls described in GAL were obviously important to Willow, Amy, and Kennedy. These field trips offered a sense of choice and variety the girls had not experienced in previous PE courses. Most of the field trips they described could be considered lifetime activities such as swimming, bowling, aerobics, and dance. These excursions into the community in order to explore further PA opportunities have been identified as important for girls' participation in elective PE programs. For example, the young women in the Gibbons (2009) study emphasized the importance of becoming comfortable in community facilities so that they could pursue activities outside of school. Jones, Hoelscher et al. (2008) and Webber et al. (2008) found that including community partners in PE can increase the number of minutes girls are physically active. Although a "Focus on Lifetime Physical Activities," was the most frequently mentioned theme mentioned by the girls in elective PE courses in the Gibbons (2009) study and a dominant thread in this study, the majority of PE programs are still predominantly competitive team sport based.

As for the nature of the activities offered in GAL, although the three participants in this study never explicitly mentioned a lack of competition, Kennedy did describe the activities in GAL as *recreational*. Competition has been found to be one of the key factors associated with girls' decision to drop PE (van Daalen, 2005). Willow, Amy, and Kennedy do not participate in organized physical activities outside of school and this could be an explanation to why they do not desire competition in their PE class. Barnett, Cliff, Morgan, and van Beurden (2013) explored adolescents' perceptions of the relationship between movement skills, physical activity and sport, and whether their perceptions differed according to extent of participation in organized

physical activities. One notable point of difference between the organized group and non-organized group's perceptions of barriers and enablers was their respective attitudes to competition. Members of the organized activity groups spoke of competition as a motivating factor, noting that some individuals thrive on this competition and that this keeps them involved and focused. In contrast to this, one female member of the non-organized group argued that toning down the emphasis on competition against opponents and emphasizing the more social aspects of involvement in activity may well net a collective increase in participants' engagement in physical activity. It appeared that the lack of competition in GAL increased the girls' motivation and engagement in the course. Finally, the teacher's choice to deemphasize competitive activities in GAL also helped to provide an inclusive and welcoming learning environment as discussed in the next thread.

5.2 Thread 2: A Fun and Welcoming Learning Environment

The second thread, "*It's okay to be weird and have fun*": *A fun and welcoming learning environment* reflected the learning environments that the girls valued throughout their PE experiences as well as some environments that made them feel vulnerable. All three girls described the nature of the learning environment in GAL, as well as some of their previous experiences in PE, as *fun*. The girls often used this term, *fun*, in conjunction with terms such as *warm*, *enthusiastic*, *relaxed*, and *nice*. This suggested to me that when their teacher and peers welcomed the girls, they became relaxed and were able to have fun and become enthusiastic about the activities without the fear of ridicule. This sentiment is similar to the Gibbons (2009) study where the young women valued feeling safe and included in their PE class.

Some researchers discuss the importance of participating with friends as a motivating factor in PE (Felton et al., 2005; Gibbons, 2009; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). Whereas Amy and

Kennedy mentioned enjoying having friends in the course, Willow did not identify having a friend in GAL. Additionally all three girls mentioned that they would enroll in GAL again even if their friends did not. This suggests that the overall learning environment of the course is more important to these girls than having friends in the class.

One aspect of the learning environment valued by Amy and Kennedy is the fact that GAL is a girls-only course. They found that this aspect allowed them more opportunities to participate and they felt more comfortable without boys in the class. This finding is similar to other qualitative inquiries into all female PE classes. The LEAP intervention (Felton et al., 2005) offered opportunities for gender separation and the girls commented how they enjoyed the female friendly atmosphere. Participants in the Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) study stated that having a girls-only class allowed them to feel comfortable and less self-conscious when participating in PA. Some participants in the Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) study felt that the female only environment was motivating and that they could participate without fear of being judged. This is consistent with a conversation I had with Amy:

Amy: *[Boys] excel at a lot of things, and they'd just be more...what's the word?*

Jenn: *(Silence)...they'd just dominate maybe?*

Amy: *Yeah.*

Additionally, Kennedy made the following statement that speaks to her motivation to participate in GAL due to the absence of boys: *...we work a lot more together cause it's all girls...and...you just, I don't know, you end up getting along better...I feel like everyone wants to work harder when there's no guys around.*

Similar to girls in previous studies (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Slater & Tiggeman, 2010), Willow experienced teasing and harassment from boys in co-educational middle school

PE. However, she did not feel that a girls-only PE option was a necessity. For her, the learning *environment in general* was more important. This is consistent with the Gibbons and Humbert (2008) study that found that although the girls mentioned how they did not like the behaviour of the boys, few said they wanted to be in separate PE classes.

Throughout my conversations with each of the girls, the importance of the teacher in creating a positive learning environment became abundantly clear. All three girls spoke highly of the teacher of GAL. The girls explained that Ms. Litto had specific strategies to help encourage a warm and welcoming learning environment:

Willow: *Sometimes I don't really want to work with people, but Ms. Litto makes me (laughing) and then I start opening up my eyes pretty much and start talking to people*

Kennedy: *... we work together as teams a lot. Usually we are just put in groups. Sometimes we choose [the groups], but usually because there's a lot of German exchange students in the class, [Ms. Litto] usually wants them all split up.*

Ms. Litto acts as a facilitator and this has been found to contribute to a positive learning environment (Dudley et al., 2010; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). Willow spoke specifically of preferring female teachers: *plus we like the teacher [now], and it's funner with girl teachers.* She spoke favourably of her female PE teacher in middle school and of Ms. Litto. This is consistent with the van Daalen (2005) study where the girls preferred same-sex teachers as they sought to make PE safe and comfortable.

5.3 Thread 3: Fair and Private Assessment

The third thread, *"It's all pretty fair"*: *Fair and private assessment* reflected the fact that all three girls felt the effort-based assessment focus throughout their PE experiences was fair. It has been found that effort-based assessment can create a sense of competence. Girls in the

Pfaeffli and Gibbons (2010) study felt that since grades in their PE course were not based solely on skill testing or skill comparison between classmates, but rather on individual effort and participation, this motivated them to put in greater effort.

One aspect of assessment that the girls experienced prior to GAL of which they shared strong feelings of distaste toward was running. Additionally, both Amy and Kennedy really disliked being assessed during a fitness testing week using a running test called the BEEP test. Willow also recalled a dance assignment that was a source of anxiety for her: *Sometimes I chew my lip, like right here, there's like a scar there.* What these assessments all had in common was that they were public; the girls were on display for the other students to judge. The girls' dislike of these public assessments is consistent with the findings of Gibbons and Humbert (2008). They found that the girls in their study were dissatisfied with their PE experiences due to the public nature of performing skills and being evaluated in front of their peers. Also, in the van Daalen (2005) study many of the girls stated that they resented being evaluated on strength, skill and coordination because they did not want to have to prove themselves or have their bodies publically judged. Interestingly, the participants in the study decided to no longer enroll in PE after the Canada Fitness Testing, of which the BEEP test is part. van Daalen (2005) found that the participants' teachers made assessment a public event, which further damaged the girls' already fragile self-esteem. However, this study shows that public assessment is only a piece of the puzzle. Willow, Amy and Kennedy described some public assessments throughout their years in PE that were not negative experiences for them – these assessments evaluated skills or knowledge in which they felt competent. Therefore, the fear of public assessment was the combination of feeling unskilled or unprepared and then performing the skill in public. It can be

hypothesized that if girls feel fit, skilled, and knowledgeable in an activity, public assessment would not be such a harmful activity for their self-esteem.

5.4 Thread 4: Confidence, Social safety, and Competence

The fact that all three girls commented on how they felt confident, socially safe, and physically competent in GAL formed the fourth and final thread: *“It just boosts up my ability and confidence”*: *Confidence, social safety, and competence*. The girls felt confident enough in GAL to participate and this participation led them to become more physically competent and this competence in turn allowed them to gain even more confidence. This positive feedback loop is described by Susan Harter's modified Competence Motivation Theory (Harter, 1992, 1999). This model demonstrates how two primary competence clusters of domains—(a) Physical Appearance, Peer Likeability, and Athletic Competence, and (b) Scholastic Competence and Behavioral Conduct—can impact feelings of self-worth both directly and indirectly through peer support. Therefore, feelings of competence in these domains may lead to the overall enhancement of self-esteem in adolescents. Harter suggests that mastery engagement and attempts to build a youth's perception of her competence, in turn, influences the girl's persistence in a task (Harter, 1988). In essence, a girl's perceptions of competence influence whether she will maintain engagement in an activity. Feeling socially safe is also a part of this cycle because the girls had to feel safe and supported (i.e. a positive learning environment) in GAL in order to try, fail, and try again to develop competence and confidence. A similar phenomenon was described by Lyu and Gill (2012); they investigated the relationships among perceived physical competence, body image, and peer acceptance. They found that for adolescent females (aged 11 to 14) perceived peer acceptance simultaneously predicts body image and also predicts perceived physical competence, which in turn predicts body image.

Since Willow, Amy and Kennedy felt socially accepted in GAL (due to the welcoming learning environment); their confidence and perceived physical competence perhaps increased which in turn then increased their social acceptance in the course.

The girls in this study felt fairly competent throughout most of their PE experiences. However, there were certain activities in which the girls perceived themselves as incompetent. Kennedy identified participation in football as a source of incompetence, Willow identified dance and walking long distances, and Amy identified soccer, dance, Pilates, and yoga as activities in which she did not feel skilled. Interestingly Amy described really enjoying GAL despite the fact that a large portion of the course's curriculum consists of activities such as dance Pilates and yoga in which she lacks perceived physical competence. This contradicts the finding by van Daalen (2005) that participants reported only enjoying PE when they were good at the activity. The finding in this study suggests that the variety in course content and the fact that she felt safe and welcomed by the learning environment in GAL was enough for Amy to remain engaged and confident in the course.

As discussed previously, the girls valued the same-sex environment of GAL. Studies have found that girls in same-sex classes have higher perceived physical competence. For example, Lyu and Gill (2011) who investigated levels of perceived physical competence, enjoyment and effort in PE class, found that females in same-sex classes had higher perceived physical competence and physical self-worth than female students in co-educational classes. For Amy, Willow, and Kennedy, they too reported feeling more competent in the activities offered in GAL than in previous co-educational PE activities.

5.5 Implications for Practice

Willow, Amy and Kennedy's stories of their PE experiences illustrate the need for evolution in physical education - created by PE teachers listening to their students. The implication for practice change is that experiences of youth will shape the content and nature of PE. A teacher can personally assess if they are making time for student input and making changes because of that input. Teachers can ask students if they enjoyed an activity, what they would change in the PE course, what their confidence level is in the various activities, and what would help them build confidence. Space for critical reflection and discussion of issues may help to ameliorate some of the challenges the participants identified in this study. The girls valued the chance to discuss issues in interviews and proved to be highly reflective regarding their experiences. They had a number of insights that strengthened the findings of this research and could be a valuable resource for educators trying to improve motivation and participation in PE. The girls' narratives highlighted the importance of developing a PE learning environment that is welcoming and fun, offers a variety of course content, assesses student learning in a fair and private manner, and builds girls' sense of competence and confidence.

To create a welcoming PE learning environment, teachers must act as facilitators and use a variety of grouping strategies to encourage girls to work together. For example, it is advisable to use a mixture of student created groups and teacher created groups. Teacher created groups allow for the teacher to divide vocal or shy students, leaders or followers, and athletes or non-athletes. Also, random groups add variety and provide the opportunity for students to work with classmates they would not usually associate with. Some specific strategies include having students select a playing card and then gather with their suit or number, or having students group with the same shirt colour, hair colour, height etc. Including a variety of grouping strategies will

allow girls to feel supported and socially safe in PE. Teachers are essential in creating a learning environment where inclusion is required and encouraged. This study suggests that creating welcoming learning environments are required in girls-only as well as co-educational PE contexts. Additionally, as discussed in this study, creating opportunities for either girls-only PE courses or girls-only lessons or units within co-educational PE may provide a more comfortable learning environment for girls; one in which they feel further motivated to participate.

The second implication for practice is to provide girls with a variety of activities throughout their years in PE, incorporating physical activities from all of the activity categories. Teachers need to select their curriculum evenly from the Games, Individual and Dual, and Rhythmic Movement activity categories. One way to ensure this is to allow the students to have a say in designing the PE course curriculum. Provide them with a survey organized under the three category headings. Ask them to select an even number of activities from under each heading. Tally up their choices and offer the most popular choices from each category. This approach creates a more balanced PE curriculum and is far more likely to engage and meet the needs of all of the students, rather than the athletic minority. The practice change requires teachers to find a compromise between the more traditional competitive team sports frequently offered and the less commonly offered lifetime activities.

The third implication for practice is an evaluation of traditional student assessments to ensure that the assessment methods are fair, meaningful, and provide students with results for their own personal growth. For example, teachers can ask students for self-assessments of their effort, participation, and confidence in particular activities. These assessment for learning strategies can be quick, for example: provide a number between 1-5, 1 being 'I did not really participate today', 5 being 'I participated fully today'; or show me a thumb up for 'I feel really

confident in this activity’, thumb sideways for ‘I feel somewhat confident in this activity’, or thumb down for ‘I do not feel confident in this activity’. These simple practice changes on assessment will address the girls’ input that being assessed on effort rather than on their skills is more likely to increase their confidence and perceived physical competence. These sample assessments can all be used privately with students. Teachers can choose a few students per class and ask for their self-assessments one-on-one. When students are assessed on skill, efforts can be made to make it a less public event. Instead of having one student perform the skill in front of a large group, teachers can set up skill assessments in a circuit fashion, so students are performing in front of a small group or a trusted peer. When performance is part of the assessment (e.g. dance or rhythmic gymnastics) teachers need to provide students with plenty of time to practice their skills and thereby increase their competence and confidence in the activity before being assessed on a public platform.

Due to the findings of this study, GAL will be adapted accordingly. The main emphasis will be placed on creating a safe and welcoming learning environment through a variety of grouping strategies in order to create a supportive network among the girls. I will aim to be a facilitator and active role model to help create this positive learning environment. Public assessment will be greatly de-emphasized and self and peer assessments will take a continuous and prominent role. GAL will take on a greater holistic approach in which I will aim to look at physical activity *with* the girls as a means of accessing numerous health and wellness benefits.

When considering the re-design of co-educational PE programs, the findings of this study could also have implications for other groups of students, including boys, who are not currently having their needs and interests met in PE. The following can apply to all PE programs and not only to tailored elective programs for girls: Listening to students (and applying their input),

creating a welcoming learning environment through grouping strategies and gender-separation opportunities, providing a variety of cooperative and lifelong activities, and utilizing fair, private, and meaningful assessment strategies.

5.6 Future Directions for Research

In this study four major threads were discovered in order to highlight three girls' experiences throughout PE and in a tailored elective PE course. More research is needed to understand girls' experiences in physical education. A number of future research directions emanated from the results of this study. Firstly, the use of narrative inquiry in PE requires further exploration of the stories of girls who did not continue to enroll in elective PE. Secondly, a narrative inquiry of one girl's experience in elective PE would allow for a more in-depth exploration with room for conversations with past and current PE teachers as well as parents. Thirdly, of interest would be to conduct a narrative inquiry of girls after high school, to examine the impact a tailored elective PE course made on their lives after graduating. Fourthly, narratives of girls who choose to continue in traditional, rather than tailored, elective PE courses would shed further light on girls who find success in the traditional PE paradigm. Fifthly, a narrative inquiry of a teacher's experiences teaching a successful tailored PE program for girls would illuminate his or her teaching and assessment strategies. Research that includes the perspective of all people involved in physically educating adolescent girls will further enhance our understanding of their experiences in PE. Finally, while this study explored the stories of three young women in PE, the limitation of qualitative research is that these girls are not representative of the entire population of girls in PE and not all adolescent females would tell similar stories. Therefore, the stories of further adolescent girls need to be told and listened to in order to

broaden this area of research. The diversity of the inquiry may potentially be increased by involving: (a) girls from different cultural groups such as First Nations, and (b) girls with different sexual orientations. Additionally, an ethnographic study of an entire girls-only elective PE course would provide insight into the collective story of a population of girls in PE. Although girls were the population of interest in this study, learning the narratives of boys in PE would allow insight into those boys' experiences who are not served by the current PE model.

5.7 Conclusions

Other research has stressed the importance of a variety in course content, a welcoming environment, fair assessment and perceived physical competence in increasing girls' participation in elective PE and this study is not so unique in identifying this. However, the narrative inquiry approach offered a way of looking with participants at the meanings of these experiences for them in more detail and importantly how their early formative experiences in PE continue to shape their current experiences in PE. In this way the stories of PE they hold now continue to shape their decision to continue in elective PE.

In order for girls to feel welcome, want to participate, and enjoy physical education, their stories need to be told. The girls in this study were willing to share their stories of their PE experiences because they were provided a comfortable, safe space where they could have their voices heard. Adolescent girls, such as Willow, Amy and Kennedy, have an understanding of how they think, feel and behave in PE, thus, their stories need to be told, heard, and ultimately responded to. The girls in this study shed light on how their experiences with the course content, learning environment, and assessment in a tailored elective PE course inspired them to continue enrolling in PE after the mandatory credits were achieved. Listening and responding to narratives

of adolescent girls' PE experiences can help improve the PE experiences for other young women. This may encourage them to continue in elective PE, thereby helping to reverse the trend of declining physical activity levels for adolescent girls, and possibly allow them to become active and healthy adults.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORMS

University
of Victoria | School of Exercise Science,
Physical & Health Education

Letter of Information

Hello,

My name is Jennifer Gruno and I am conducting a study at the University of Victoria entitled “Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?”

I am a graduate student in the School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education at UVic and as a graduate student I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Physical Education.

The purpose of my study is to examine the experiences of girls who continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. My goal is to gain insight into their past and current experiences in PE and their reasons for continued enrollment.

This study is important because many young women today are not active enough to achieve health benefits. A large number of girls choose not to take elective PE due to a dislike of typical PE classes. Learning why some girls choose to continue is important, so that other girls, through changes to course design, will also make the decision to stay active in PE.

Your daughter is being asked to participate in this study because she has decided to continue in elective PE. Her experiences in the course as well as her past experiences in PE will help to answer the research questions. If she agrees to voluntarily participate in this research, her participation will include a one hour interview during PE class time with me.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to your daughter, including the one hour away from PE class; however, there are no known or anticipated risks to her by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your daughter’s participation include providing insight into why some girls make the decision to continue in elective PE as well as to learn about a unique PE program that other teachers may choose to use as a model for their own classes. The experiences she shares may encourage teachers to make changes to other PE programs, ultimately increasing physical activity participation and positively impacting the health of other girls her age.

Your daughter’s participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If she does decide to participate, she may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If she does withdraw from the study her data will be removed. If she has already participated in the interview, her data will still be included in the study with no identifying information.

In terms of protecting her identity, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant and to the school right at the beginning of the research and will be used in the results. Being completely anonymous will not be possible because of the nature of the interview as I will be aware of her identity. Additionally, her classmates will likely know that she is part of the study as she will be missing a PE class to be interviewed.

Your daughter's privacy and the confidentiality of all of her interview information will be protected by password for computer files, a locked cabinet for hard copies, and the destruction of data two years after my thesis is defended. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a thesis defense and a published article in a journal.

The reason you have received this letter of information and this consent package is because your daughter has expressed an interest in participating in this study. If you give permission for her to participate please sign the parent consent form, have your daughter sign the participant consent form, seal the forms in the envelope provided, and return them to the main school office by the end of the week. As you will notice, the envelope has my name on it, so the package will be passed on to me after school on Friday, October 12th.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gruno



Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?” that is being conducted by Jennifer Gruno.

Jennifer Gruno is a graduate student in the department of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at jgruno@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Physical Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Gibbons. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8383 or sgibbons@uvic.ca.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of girls who continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. Insight will be gained into their past and current experiences in PE and their reasons for continued enrollment.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because many young women today are insufficiently physically active to achieve health benefits. A large number of adolescent females opt out of elective physical education due to dissatisfaction with the nature of typical PE classes. Discovering the reasons why some girls choose to continue is important, so that others, through changes to course design, will also make the decision to stay active in PE.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have decided to continue in elective PE. Your experiences in the course as well as your past experiences in PE will answer the research questions.

What is Involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a one hour interview during class time with Jennifer Gruno.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the one hour away from physical education class.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include providing insight into why some girls make the decision to continue in elective PE as well as to learn about a unique physical education program that other teachers may choose to use as a model for their own classes. The experiences you share may encourage teachers to make changes to other PE programs, ultimately increasing physical activity participation and positively impacting the health of other girls your age.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data from the interview will be removed. If you have already participated in the interview, your data will still be included in the study with no identifying information.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will outline the requirements of participation in the study before entering into a researcher-participant relationship both verbally and through this consent form. I will also ensure that you are aware that you can withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence to you.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant and to the school at the data collection stage and will be used in the dissemination of results. Anonymity is limited because of the nature of the interview as the researcher is aware of the participant's identity.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by password for computer files, a locked cabinet for hard copies, and the destruction of data two years after the thesis is defended.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: thesis defense and a published article in a journal.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of two years after the thesis is defended. Electronic data will be erased, and paper copies will be shredded.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the researcher, Jennifer Gruno, and the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Sandra Gibbons. Contact information is listed at the beginning of this form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
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A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.



Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?

Your daughter is invited to participate in a study entitled “Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?” that is being conducted by Jennifer Gruno.

Jennifer Gruno is a graduate student in the department of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at jgruno@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Physical Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Gibbons. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8383 or sgibbons@uvic.ca.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study will be to examine the experiences of girls who continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. Insight will be gained into their past and current experiences in PE and their reasons for continued enrollment.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because many young women today are insufficiently physically active to achieve health benefits. A large number of adolescent females opt out of elective physical education due to dissatisfaction with the nature of typical PE classes. Discovering the reasons why some girls choose to continue is important, so that others, through changes to course design, will also make the decision to stay active in PE.

Participants Selection

Your daughter is being asked to participate in this study because she has decided to continue in elective PE. Her experiences in the course as well as her past experiences in PE will answer the research questions.

What is Involved

If your daughter agrees to voluntarily participate in this research, her participation will include a one hour interview during class time with Jennifer Gruno.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to your daughter, including the one hour away from physical education class. Non participating students will engage in regular class activities during this time.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your daughter's participation in this research include providing insight into why some girls make the decision to continue in elective PE as well as to learn about a unique physical education program that other teachers may choose to use as a model for their own classes. The experiences she shares may encourage teachers to make changes to other PE programs, ultimately increasing physical activity participation and positively impacting the health of other girls her age.

Voluntary Participation

Your daughter's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If your daughter does decide to participate, she may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If she does withdraw from the study her data from the interview will be removed. If she has already participated in the interview, her data will still be included in the study with no identifying information.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you and your daughter continue to consent to participate in this research, I will outline the requirements of participation in the study before entering into a researcher-participant relationship both verbally and through this consent form. I will also ensure that your daughter is aware that she can withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence to her.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your daughter's anonymity pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant and to the school at the data collection stage and will be used in the dissemination of results. Anonymity is limited because of the nature of the interview as the researcher is aware of the participant's identity.

Confidentiality

Your daughter's confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by password for computer files, a locked cabinet for hard copies, and the destruction of data two years after the thesis is defended.

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In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.



Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Exploring Girls' Experiences in a Tailored Elective Physical Education Course: Why do they Continue?” that is being conducted by Jennifer Gruno.

Jennifer Gruno is a graduate student in the department of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at jgruno@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Physical Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Gibbons. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8383 or sgibbons@uvic.ca.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study will be to examine the experiences of girls who continue to enroll in a tailored elective physical education course. Insight will be gained into their past and current experiences in PE and their reasons for continued enrollment.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because many young women today are insufficiently physically active to achieve health benefits. A large number of adolescent females opt out of elective physical education due to dissatisfaction with the nature of typical PE classes. Discovering the reasons why some girls choose to continue is important, so that others, through changes to course design, will also make the decision to stay active in PE.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are teaching the students of interest.

What is Involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will only involve teaching as you normally would as well as releasing each participant for one hour of class time in order to participate in the interview.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including having one student miss an hour of physical education class during each interview time. Non participating students will engage in regular class activities during this time.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include providing insight into why some girls make the decision to continue in elective PE as well as to learn about a unique physical education program that other teachers may choose to use as a model for their own classes. The experiences shared by the students may encourage teachers to make changes to other PE programs, ultimately increasing physical activity participation and positively impacting the health of other girls your age.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will outline the requirements of participation in the study before entering into a researcher-participant relationship both verbally and through this consent form. I will also ensure that you are aware that you can withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence to you.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant and to the school at the data collection stage and will be used in the dissemination of results.

Confidentiality

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Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the researcher, Jennifer Gruno, and the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Sandra Gibbons. Contact information is listed at the beginning of this form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
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A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

PE Experiences in Elementary School and Middle School

Main query: Please tell me about your experiences with physical education class in elementary and middle school.

Inviting questions and probes:

- Describe for me one time when you recall really enjoying PE and really disliking it.
 - What was going on?
- Describe your experiences with the course content.
 - Did you get some choice of activities? Or did the teacher make the decisions?
 - If there was some choice, how did this happen (e.g. completed a survey, got a choice between competitive and recreational activities etc.)
 - Was there variety in the kinds of activities? Did you play mostly team games? Did you do dance activities? Outdoor activities? Individual fitness activities?
- How good at the activities did you feel?
 - For example, did you feel really bad in soccer but good in dance?
 - What activities did you feel better/worse in then others? Dance? Fitness activities? Team sports?
- Describe your experiences with the learning environment (the climate or feeling of the class)?
 - What are some things the teacher did to help you work with the other students?
- Describe your experiences with the grading in PE during elementary and middle school.
 - What are some things you remember/liked/didn't like about grading in elementary and middle school PE?

PE Experiences in Grades 9 and 10

Main query: I would like to hear about your experiences in PE 9 and 10.

Inviting questions and probes:

- Describe your experiences with the course content in PE 9 and 10.
 - Did you get some choice of activities? Or did the teacher make the decisions?
 - If there was some choice, how did this happen (e.g. completed a survey, got a choice between competitive and recreational activities etc.)
 - Was there variety in the kinds of activities? Did you play mostly team games? Did you do dance activities? Outdoor activities? Individual fitness activities?
- How good at the activities did you feel?
 - What activities did you feel better/worse in then others? Dance? Fitness activities? Team sports?
- Describe your experiences with the learning environment (the climate or feeling of the class) in PE 9 and 10.

- What are some things the teacher did to help you work with the other students?
- Describe your experiences with the grading in PE 9 and 10.
 - What are some things you remember/liked/didn't like about grading in PE 9 and 10?

PE Experiences in GAL

Main query: Please tell me about your experiences in Girls Actively Living.

Inviting questions and probes:

- How does GAL compare to your elementary, middle school, and grade 9/10 physical education courses?
 - Describe some of the differences between elementary/middle school PE, grade 9/10 and GAL
 - What are some similarities?
- Describe your experiences with the course content in GAL.
 - Do you get some choice of activities? Or does the teacher make the decisions?
 - If there is some choice, how does this happen (e.g. complete a survey, get a choice between competitive and recreational activities etc.)
 - Is there variety in the kinds of activities? Do you play mostly team games? Do you do dance activities? Outdoor activities? Individual fitness activities?
- How good at the activities do you feel?
- Describe your experiences with the learning environment (the climate or feeling of the class) in GAL.
 - What are some things the teacher does to help you work with the other students?
- Describe your experiences with the grading in GAL.
 - What are some things you like about grading in GAL?
 - What are some things you dislike about grading in GAL?
- Please tell me about your decision-making process when you decided to continue in PE after your grade ten year.
 - E.g. did you discuss your decision with anyone? Parents? Friends? Teacher?

Other Girls

Main query: Why do you think some girls don't take PE after grade ten?

Inviting questions and probes:

- Please tell me about your friends; are most of them enrolled in senior PE?
 - E.g. are some of your friends in coed PE and some in GAL?
 - Why do you think they did/did not enroll?
- How do your friends feel about PE?
 - Do your friends like PE? Dislike?
 - As for your friends who did not enroll, what were their reasons?
 - E.g. didn't fit in their timetables?

Physical Activity Outside of School

Main query: What do you do for physical activity outside of school?

Inviting questions and probes:

- In what ways did your family play a part in your decision to continue in PE either directly or indirectly?
 - Did you discuss your choice with parent(s)? Siblings? Other family members?
 - Do you remember a specific incident that informed your decision?
- I would like to hear about any experiences outside of school that influenced your decision to continue in PE.
- Please describe any ways that your experiences in GAL have influenced you to live an active lifestyle after high school.