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An Exploration of Physical Education Teachers' Perceptions of and Experiences With Body Image

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An Exploration of Physical Education Teachers' Perceptions of and Experiences With Body Image

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents who have guided me where I am today. Their constant support and love has shown me that I can accomplish anything and be anyone I aspire to be.

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First, I would like to thank my amazing advisor, Dr. Alicia Stapp. I would not have been able to complete this thesis without your guidance and precise critiques and comments over the last two years. I am so grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to work on this project with your direction and support. You have encouraged me to continue and push through even when I felt like it was impossible. The patience, support, and encouragement you have shown me will be with me throughout my future endeavors.

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Lastly, I wish to extend my appreciation to my second and third readers, Dr. Prior and Dr. Jowers, as well as all the professors that I had the pleasure to learn from at Ole Miss. The University of Mississippi has been my home for the last four years and I will cherish the friendships made and time spent here for the rest of my life.

ABSTRACT

NATALLIE NOEL: An Exploration of Physical Education Teachers' Perceptions of and Experiences
With Body Image
(Under the direction of Dr. Alicia Stapp)

Adolescents experience a broad range of physical and emotional changes and begin looking to

peers and social media to determine what their bodies should look like through the lens of society.

This process of adolescents beginning to visualize themselves is known as body image. These include

physical competence, motivation, self-esteem, and confidence through the way the teachers interact

with students, develop positive learning spaces, and develop and implement intentional instruction

and programs, thus, providing a space where adolescents begin to develop a healthy perception of

their own body (Kerner et al., 2017). However, the breadth of literature on body image, what

variables in the school setting impact body image, and how they affect adolescents within the

classroom (general and physical education) reveal minimal studies in relation to the impact teachers

have on how students view themselves. Therefore, this study explored physical education teachers'

experiences with body image and their perceptions and experiences with addressing and/or teaching

body image in their classrooms and/or across the school setting through a qualitative approach.

Physical education teachers were interviewed and three themes emerged. These were categorized as

follows: (a) promoting positive body image through health and physical education initiatives and

pedagogy; (b) barriers to teaching body image; and (c) shifting the mindset to body positivity. These

findings result in a better understanding of ways in which schools and teachers can promote and

encourage body positivity, leading to a more positive view of one's own body.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents experience a broad range of physical and emotional changes and begin looking to peers and social media to determine what their bodies should look like when viewed through the lens of society. This process of adolescents beginning to visualize themselves is known as body image. Body image is defined as, "The subjective picture or mental image of one's own body" (Hosseini, 2021, p. 2). During this phase, many adolescents not only begin to view themselves, but also start comparing their attractiveness and body size to their peers. This behavior can lead to the emergence of negative constructs, such as low self-esteem, isolation, and feelings of depression (National Eating Disorders Association, 2018). It can also be a catalyst to a detrimental cycle prompting adolescents to believe they must appear a certain way (Kennedy, 2019). However, it is important to note that body image is developmental and therefore does not represent a static characteristic, but rather a dynamic aspect of one's self that can evolve over time (Voelker, 2015). Hosseini (2021) mentions that peers can have a significant impact on body image in people aged 14 to 27. Due to its malleable nature and magnitude of age-related transitions, adolescence represents a critical period for healthy body image development.

This conceived perception of how one's body should look — both positive and negative — is experienced by both males and females alike. However, today's society puts more of an emphasis on the "perfect" female body, causing females to be more keenly aware of comparing themselves to other females (Picard, 2009). As a result of this societal pressure, "Female body image dissatisfaction is generally associated with a desire for a thinner physique, whereas male body dissatisfaction results from either a desire to be more muscular or a desire to be thinner" (Kerner et al., 2017, p. 3).

While the societal impacts on body image are certainly prevalent, this issue also tends to emerge within the school environment during the adolescent years, ages 10-19. This is because one's

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setting is a significant factor in how they perceive themselves (Kerner et al., 2017). The school environment in large part is where students spend most of their time during the day, therefore, it can be an impetus for negative or positive effects on an adolescent's body image. These effects can surface because of several different variables. These include the way their classmates treat them, how they are treated in school, and how they view themselves (Springer, 2016).

According to Kerner et al. (2017),

> In the co-educational setting girls have been reported to feel that their bodies are under scrutiny from boys, which leads to reported increases in body anxiety. When females anticipate the male gaze, it can result in increases in body shame and social physique anxiety. Moreover, girls place increased value on their physical appearance in the co-educational context (p. 4).

> Males alike experience conceived perceptions of how their body should look and idealize

appearing muscular or "masculine" in front of others (Hosseini, 2021). However, it is important to note that there are similarities and differences when comparing males and females. As previously noted, females in society are prone to "perfecting" and showing young girls that the only body type that is accepted is one of a thin figure (Kerner et al., 2017). Similarly, male body dissatisfaction comes from a desire to be more muscular and/or a desire to be thinner (Kerner et al., 2017). It is essential to understand specific gender body norms and the reasonings behind them in order to recognize body disturbances in girls and boys (Kerner et al., 2017). In one example, Picard (2009) stated the following:

> High school females who identified with the androgynous and masculine gender roles were more likely to have high self-esteem. However, they were more likely to be perfectionists, thus, increasing their risk of developing an eating disorder. These results suggest there are

links among a female's level of perfectionism, and gender-role orientation and self-esteem,

which are all aspects of an individual's personality (p. 11).

While females and males experience similar situations throughout adolescence, there is more of an emphasis regarding the way society says females should look (Kerner et al., 2017).

Kerner et al. (2017) provides guidance and direction throughout this manuscript because of the understanding that their research demonstrates on the topic of body image specifically in the physical education (PE) classroom. Kerner et al. was also chosen as this work parallels the direction that the topic of body image is heading in regards to promoting body positivity and the programs and interventions found within the PE classroom. Dr. Charlotte Kerner is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Health and Exercise Sciences. Two of her main areas of research encompass body image and its relation to physical activity and PE in children and adolescents as well as the role PE has on encouraging physical activity and adolescents' well-being during their life. She has published a plethora of articles over the past decade in well-known journals (i.e., *Journal of School Health, European Physical Education Review, American Journal of School Health, International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*). The articles focused on these topics and her research is cited by educators and researchers across the globe.

 In light of the aforementioned research on body image related to adolescents, schools and teachers have an opportunity to play an essential role in creating positive environments that can promote and encourage positive perceptions of physical competence and body positivity, resulting in a more positive view of one's own body (Kerner et al., 2017). Throughout this manuscript, the topic of body image, what variables in the school setting influence and shape one's body image, and how it affects adolescents within the academic and PE classroom will be explored. More specifically, the

researcher chose to focus on physical educators' experiences with and perceptions of body image and how teachers can promote and/or positively or negatively impact adolescents' body image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Body image has the capacity to positively or negatively impact adolescents' overall well-being (Kerner et al., 2017). Throughout this literature review we will explore the notion of what body image is, how it impacts an adolescent's life, as well as the relationship between the school environment, specifically in the PE setting and its ability to shape an adolescent's body image. Furthermore, the researcher will investigate current strategies, methods, techniques, and programs that are utilized in the PE setting to address body image and note any deficiencies that emerge within the literature.

While school may be a setting that can contribute to one's perceived body image, it may also prove to be one of the most opportune settings for promoting the importance of positive body image, mental health awareness, PE, and physical literacy for adolescents (Kennedy, 2019). Using or refining existing programs, such as PE classes, may be a cost-effective way of reaching a large amount of youth to promote positive outcomes. Physical education classes encourage and can provide a space for positive physical activity (PA) experiences within schools, while also integrating aspects of physical, social, and emotional health (Kennedy, 2019). Such classes are also an important part of promoting positive body image as they enable students to exercise in a space that is intended to be a safe environment (Kennedy, 2019). Additionally, PA in adolescence has also been shown to decrease depression and anxiety, which has close links to body image (Kennedy, 2019). However, negative comments about body image from teachers and students can cause adverse effects and could detract from the opportunity to promote positive body image (Kerner et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to emphasize that teachers who work with adolescents should seize the opportunity to promote positive words and encouragement in order to nurture positive self-esteem, body image, and higher

confidence levels in themselves, potentially leading to students viewing themselves in a positive light (Kerner et al., 2017).

Body Image Defined

Body image is defined as, "the subjective picture or mental image of one's own body" (Hosseini, 2021, p. 2). Adolescence, the time between childhood to adulthood (ages 10-19), is an impressionable time in relation to body image, as both females and males go through a variety of developmental changes. Hosseini (2021) mentions that by the age of six, children are becoming more aware of their body shape, especially weight and muscle. Even though the age range of adolescence is 10-19, children start to view their body at a very early age. These body changes occur socially, physically, and mentally as adolescents begin to learn more about themselves and the world around them. Birbeck et al. (2003) noted that,

> Body image ideals were apparent in girls as young as seven to eight years of age. Even
> identifying that girls six years of age displayed evidence of body image dissatisfaction in a
> manner that was not apparent in girls of five years of age. (p. 117)

During a child's adolescent years and even earlier, many begin looking at themselves and comparing their attractiveness and body size to their peers, which can create negative constructs, such as low self-esteem, isolation, and feelings of depression (National Eating Disorders Association, 2018). This detrimental cycle can make adolescents believe they must look a certain way (Kennedy, 2019).

Body Image Constructs

The concept of "body image" was termed by Paul Schilder as "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Schilder, 1964, p. 1). Research indicates that body image is composed of a perceptual (sensory perception) and attitudinal component (cognitive and affective factors). Perceptual ideas look at size estimation and

the shape of someone's body while attitudinal relates to the ideas of someone being satisfied or dissatisfied with their body size or shape (Kerner et al., 2017). Each of these components are required to be present when exploring and evaluating body image (Kerner et al., 2017).

Both components of body image — perceptual and attitudinal — comprise the way a person perceives their body compared to the way their body actually looks. These measurements are utilized to gauge the way both adolescent females and males view themselves (Kerner et al., 2017). Another facet of body image is body disturbance, which emerges when adolescents view themselves in a negative way that goes against their physical appearance (Kerner et al., 2017). There have been few studies that look at body image discrepancy. A recent study indicated that "57% of adolescent males and 57.7% of adolescent females are dissatisfied with their bodies" (Kerner et al., 2017, p. 3). While these findings indicate that there may not be much of a gap between females and males in regard to body dissatisfaction, other researchers (e.g., Avci & Akliman, 2018: Wang et al., 2019) disagree, leaving behind a trail of mixed results.

Factors Affecting Body Image and Solutions

School Setting

As aforementioned, the school setting can have a large scale impact on body image as adolescents begin to compare their physical appearance to peers in social settings and may become dissatisfied with their body. This unintentionally causes weight-related stereotypes (Springer, 2016). Research indicates that this issue could partially be caused by educators who may lack the awareness and/or receive minimal training regarding strategies or interventions that might prevent negative body image and eating disorders (Springer, 2016). Supporting this notion, Springer (2016) noted the following:

Pre-service school counselors may not be required to take specific coursework in

psychopathology as part of their graduate training. This discrepancy may be one factor

impacting practicing school counselors' confidence in supporting issues around disordered

eating. (p. 6)

Many schools that are fortunate enough to have programs and resources available for their students

focus on working with adolescents and young adults. Programs include counseling programs within

their school directed at helping students with body image distortion and disordered eating (Springer,

2016).

Further impacting body image in the school setting are negative attitudes and unrealistic

expectations, such as feeling overweight or underweight. These thoughts are particularly salient in

body image disturbances and can affect self-esteem which results in negative school, home, and

social interactions. These feelings are exceptionally prevalent during adolescence as perceptual body

image emerges during social interactions in the school setting (Kerner et al., 2017). To mitigate such

issues, teachers can take preventative measures by looking out for negative signs and symptoms that

may affect negative attitudes. Behaviors may include abnormal eating patterns, dieting, skipping

lunch, and avoiding preferred or specific foods (Springer, 2016). Addressing topics such as peer

influence, physical appearance, and social media in the classroom — specifically the health and PE

classroom — could also act as interventions for students. While these interventions may prove

helpful, health and physical educators have revealed barriers such as a lack of knowledge, minimal

time, and avoidance of the topic altogether (Dyrstad et al., 2018; Kerner et al., 2017).

Home Setting

Along with neurological and biological causes, research has been conducted to address the

different sociocultural factors that influence body dissatisfaction among the adolescent population

(Springer, 2016). Factors include social changes, influence from parents and guardians both in home and out of home settings, peers, and the changing impact that social media and technology have on the daily messages relayed to adolescents around body image (Springer, 2016). When adolescents internalize themselves through a negative mental image it affects their self-esteem, leading to issues with social interactions, school, and at home (Springer, 2016). Moreover, adolescents who receive dismissive interactions from family members such as negative comments about their body, clothes, or choices in their home settings can cause them to develop a negative perception of their body. This not only affects the relationship adolescents have with themselves, but their relationships with others throughout life (Hosseini, 2021; Springer, 2016).

The home setting is critical as research indicates that when children grow up with families that are emotionally affectionate, supportive, warm, and available, they create a safe environment where adolescents feel more secure and see themselves in a healthier way than peers raised in an unsupportive environment (Kerner et al., 2017; Michael, 2014; Solano-Pinto, 2021). This includes who they live with at home, their economic status, and whether or not they feel safe in their home environment (Michael, 2014). One study revealed that children who have supportive families that teach them about body positivity have more confidence and body image satisfaction over a period of time (Michael, 2014). When children are nurtured throughout their childhood by family members, research also indicates a significant impact on positive development in young children as well as a long lasting effect on children's image of themselves (Michael, 2014; Solano-Pinto, 2021).

Physical Education Classroom

In addition to the above-mentioned settings, the PE classroom also plays one of the most important roles in providing students with information about healthy body image (Kerner et al., 2017). Brubaker (2011) found that:

Researchers found that students who engage in daily physical activity within the school setting will achieve the health benefits they need to be physically fit more so than those students which do not engage in daily physical activity throughout the school day. (p. 5)

The PE classroom is a very important and beneficial aspect to students' health and wellbeing (Peary, 2021). This is because it has the potential to provide students many opportunities such as leadership roles and positive relationships with peers. It also encourages students to make decisions which is a lifelong skill, and can indirectly lead to improved academic performance within the PE and general classroom (Peary, 2021).

Physical Education Teacher

A PE teacher's job is to create a positive environment where students are able to learn more about themselves, physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Kennedy, 2019). When teachers understand the relationship between PE and body image in both females and males, they are better able to help their adolescent students in the PE classroom to improve their sense of what it means to have a healthy body image. This relationship is important because when adolescents see themselves in a way that demonstrates self love rather than body disturbance it allows for positive physical, mental, and sexual health outcomes (Kennedy, 2019). When PE teachers take these differences into consideration, they are going to be more successful in attracting and retaining the interest and participation of all their students (Kennedy, 2019).

Physical Education Curriculum

In regard to physical activities that adolescents participate in at school during PE, Brubaker (2011) suggests that there should be a "focus on differences in physical skills" and that "what females need compared to what males need to create an effective program are different" (p. 17). For example,

research shows that girls indicate that they were more interested in cooperative activities, fitness, and dance than boys (Brubaker, 2011). Gil (2020) mentions the importance of PA in curriculum:

> Not only does physical activity help students lead a healthier lifestyle it can also be traced to a student's success in the classroom. Physical education may not be graded heavily or considered beneficial towards academics, but research shows that students experience a boost in academic scores by having some physical activity in their curriculum. (p. 3)

Social Media

Beyond the environments of home and school, there are additional factors such as social media that can have a significant daily impact on adolescents and the messages they receive about their body (Burnette et al., 2017; Springer, 2016), ultimately impacting views of their own body image. Social media is one of the greatest influencers in the 21st century, especially as it pertains to body image (Rodgers et al., 2020). As new social media platforms arise such as Instagram and Tik Tok, the more students are exposed to pictures and videos of the "perfect" image men and women are supposed to live up to (Murphy, 2011). This puts the idea into young adolescents' minds that they are supposed to look "perfect" to fit into a society that is realistically lying to their audience (Springer, 2016).

One way teachers and parents can address this issue is to expose their student/child to positive messages rather than negative and to encourage critical thinking skills by teaching them about media literacy (Burnette et al., 2017; Choate, 2007). Media literacy is defined as an approach to better understand media messages around the world and how it can shape culture or a society (What is media literacy, 2020). Teaching media literacy encourages children to develop positive habits that encourage a balanced and healthy lifestyle. However, with today's social media, children are exposed to alternative and negative body images that they see on television, movies, video games, and social

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media platforms (Choate, 2007). When utilized in an effective manner, the media has the capability to provide a platform that can entertain and inform children positively. Unfortunately, since most children are not taught the skills grounded in media literacy which enable them to use it thoughtfully, "many media messages contribute to public health issues such as obesity, bullying and aggression, low self-esteem, depression, negative body image, risky sexual behavior, and substance abuse, among other problems" (What is media literacy, 2020, p. 1). To address this issue, Choate (2007) suggests having separate dialogue for females and males that is focused on positive body awareness and gender norms. Conversations could include how the "norm" in today's society is not realistic to everyone's body and to focus on themselves and not what society portrays in social media which in reality is photoshop.

Peers

Both positive and negative communication that comes from a peer can also have a large impact on adolescents' perceptions of their body image. At a young age, having peer approval is considered a priority when looked at by a student or students who are considered "popular" or who are considered to be the "perfect" body type (Springer, 2016). Research has shown that when adolescent females compare themselves to their peers, they are at a higher risk to experience body type dissatisfaction and view themselves negatively (Krones et al., 2005; Voelker et al., 2015). Body dissatisfaction occurs when an adolescent has negative thoughts and feelings about their own body resulting in a negative body image. The most vulnerable to dissatisfaction in regard to weight are adolescent females. This is because at this age females look to their peers for approval which leads to more weight-based teasing from other peers (Murphy, 2011).

Young females and males are always looking for reassurance whether that is from a peer or guardian. Having a strong friendship group can allow for positive peer interactions and helps to build

one another up rather than tear each other down. Positive peer influences and healthy friendships allow young females and males to see their self-worth and leaves them less dependent on comparing themselves to what they perceive society values, thus, leading to healthier body image development (Murphy, 2011).

Impact of Perceived Body Image on Adolescents

Cultural Contexts

While body image can have a significant impact on many facets of an adolescent's life, it is important to note that cultural norms can also play a large role in how body image is viewed across different areas of the world. One country's body type "norm" may be vastly different from another country's perception. A person's culture can also be considered a shielding tactic against societal pressure to fit into the thin standard set in the country they are living (Warren et al., 2005). For example, a study conducted by Warren et al. (2005) showed that Caucasian adolescents were more aware of their body image and that body dissatisfaction was higher when compared to Hispanic or Mexican American adolescents. In today's society, African American women who display a large figure are valued by society as strong (Warren et al., 2005). However, society shows that Caucasian women are supposed to be referred to in discourse as thin and sexual. African American female adolescents still express a desire to have a thinner figure (Warren et al., 2005). When African American females were asked to describe their body figure, they described themselves as having a "thick" figure. When asked how they would like to be seen in society, they displayed a desire to be somewhat smaller than they see themselves (Warren et al, 2005). Despite cultural differences, negative body image can have negative implications, both physically and mentally. This can lead to unmotivated adolescents in school who lack the ability to strive for goals such as furthering their education and social skills (Murphy, 2011; Voelker, 2015).

Additionally, common considerations when discussing differing cultural norms regarding body image include social interaction, clothing restrictions, language and diet (Fostering cultural diversity, 2022). Research has shown that cultural norms can impact a person's attitude or their ability to participate in PA (Social Environment Level, 2010). For example, some cultures view exercise as selfish and not important (Social Environment Level, 2010). Others have different clothing requirements that make it challenging to participate in PA, such as when men must wear a turban or a woman must wear a hijab or skirt (Social Environment Level, 2010).

Physical Activity

One particular domain where body image can impact adolescents is their desire to participate in PA. Adolescents who have developed a healthier body image and a more positive view of their body are more likely to participate in PA than those who have an unhealthy body image (Kennedy, 2019). Participation in PA has been shown to play a large role in decreasing anxiety and depression, which are both related to body image (Kennedy, 2019). Thus, when schools take advantage of PE classes and/or classroom PA they have the capacity to reach a significant number of students at a minimal cost (Dyrstad et al., 2018). Physical Education classes can also provide students with a place to expand their knowledge while encouraging them to participate in physical activities in school that might have the capacity to increase positive body image (Dyrstad et al., 2018; Kennedy, 2019). While PA can have a significant and positive impact on adolescents' body image, the researcher does acknowledge and outlined in the above section the role of the PE teacher, classroom, and curriculum in regard to PA outcomes for adolescents.

Self-Esteem and Confidence

Another factor impacting students in regard to body image is self-esteem. Self-Esteem is "how we value and perceive ourselves. It is based on our opinions and beliefs about ourselves, which

can sometimes feel really difficult to change" (What is self-esteem, p. 1). Self-esteem is directly linked to body image as the "literature shows self-esteem issues to be a major result of body image dissatisfaction and how it affects an individual's mindset of themselves and others" (Murphy, 2011, p. 27). There are multiple definitions of being "successful" in the classroom but one definition of school success is "trouble avoidance, grades, and school engagement" (Murphy, 2011, p. 28). When students are given support both at home and throughout the school day, they have shown a higher level of personal value of education, grades, and educational achievement (Murphy, 2011).

Confidence is often associated with self-esteem and how an individual carries themselves in addition to the way they view their appearance. Appearance is described as, "manipulable and dependent on personality, in the way that one carries herself/himself and her/his confidence" (Murphy, 2011, p. 17). An impactful factor to self appearance satisfaction is using what you have and working with it (Murphy, 2011). It is important for teachers to provide positive practices that support student success in school, especially at times when students do not feel confident in their own bodies (Murphy, 2011). When students do not feel confident in their own skills and do not have support mechanisms in place, they may experiment with substances such as alcohol or nicotine in search of something that they think might help or deviate away from their negative feelings. This may lead to caring less about school and putting themselves into different situations that may result in them showing up late every day or not at all (Tort-Nasarre, 2021).

Physical Education Defined

While there are many variables such as the above-mentioned that can impact one's body image, perhaps one of the most ideal settings to encourage, teach, and shape a positive body image is in the PE setting (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Physical education has existed since ancient times and can be traced back to ancient Greece (Merriam-Webster, 2021). However, it was not until the early to

mid-nineteenth century that the term was introduced in the United States as soldiers were trained for battle during the Civil War. Shortly thereafter, PE was enacted into law in public schools and has progressed through multiple transformations over the past two centuries (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Aspects that guide a PE teacher's daily and weekly interactions within the classroom are knowing that practical knowledge works with professional knowledge to guide lesson planning (Romar, 2017). Geisler (2017) mentions the importance of teacher socialization and education through the following:

> The importance of investigating the relationship between teacher socialization and teacher education suggests that personal experiences in schools, first as students, and later as teachers, influence teaching even more than formal teacher education programs. This is particularly the case in physical education (PE) where occupational socialization theory suggests that learning to teach PE is a complex socialization process. (p. 3)

Current State of Physical Education and National Recommendations

Currently, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) (2022) recommends 150 minutes of PA a week for elementary students, while it is recommended that middle and high school students should participate in 225 minutes of PA per week. Additionally and in support of the recommended PA, the National Physical Education Standards and K-12 grade level outcomes were created in 2014 by the Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) as a roadmap to prepare students to be physically literate in order to become healthy adults. The term "physical literacy" is defined as, "the ability, confidence, and desire to be physically active for life and has parallel efforts for inclusion of physical education with the Common Core State Standards Initiative" (Communication - Department of Defense, 2014). These standards were developed in 2014 to help clearly define what physical literacy is and what a physically literate student should be able to

do and understand. The creation of these standards has helped to support an approach to help guide students to be physically active, which has positive benefits that are both short term and long term on their physical and mental health.

These standards were put into place to hold state and local systems accountable for what students are learning and advocate for PE. "If student learning relative to state and the national standards in physical education is not measured, reported, analyzed and/or disseminated, educational systems are not informed on priorities or action items for improvement" (Tsuda, 2019, p. 10). There are four critical components of a robust accountability set up for PE. They include legislation/policy, data collection, data monitoring, and data evaluation and dissemination (Tsuda, 2019). An accountability system provides a framework for states to follow to ensure their students are learning the necessary skills. However, some educators believe that an accountability system narrows what students learn in PE. Despite differences in opinion, without an accountability system more questions emerge regarding what students are learning in PE (Tsuda, 2019). Therefore, it is important that PE experts work together to decide what the best approach for an effective system is as there are a multitude of ways this can be orchestrated. Ultimately, experts look at the needs of their students and the community to meet their needs (Tsuda, 2019).

Another vital component of organizational support for children's PA is The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2018) which clearly outlines the importance of PA, especially during adolescence. They suggest an adequate amount of time should be allotted for adolescents and adults as well as provide example opportunities to meet daily goals. Recommendations reveal that adolescents should acquire a minimum of 60 minutes or more of daily moderate to vigorous PA. Activities might include, "aerobic, muscle-strengthening and bone strengthening" exercises (U.S. Health and Human Service, 2018, p. 48). While the recommendation

of 60 minutes per day of PA is ideal, it is important to note that it can not likely just take place in the PE classroom. There are many different ways teachers can incorporate PA within the school day such as during recess, classroom time, and before/after school. One program that addresses the need for a more comprehensive school-wide approach to PA is the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP). This program provides a "framework for planning and organizing activities in this component" (SHAPE America, 2019, p. 1), and ultimately assists schools with meeting the nationally-recommended 60 minutes of PA everyday. The goals of a CSPAP include providing different physical activities that engage students in 60 minutes of PA everyday and provide understanding, practice of physical and health related skills learned in PE, and applying what they have learned within the PE classroom (SHAPE America, 2019).

Despite the recommendations and availability of the CSPAP framework, it can be challenging for adolescents to meet these daily PA goals as each state has different requirements regarding PE in the school setting. Compounding this issue, NASPE (2013) noted the following:

74.5% of states require students to take PE from elementary through high school but inadequacies in state policies place challenging hurdles on the path to progress. Twenty-eight states allow exemptions and waivers, only twenty-two states require schools to allot a specific amount of time for PE, only ten states designate specific funding for professional development in PE, only six states require PE in every grade, only three states require schools to provide the nationally recommended 150 min per week of PE in elementary school, and only three states require schools to provide the nationally recommended 225 min per week of PE in high school. (p. 1)

*** Shift in the Purpose of Physical Education***

While PE was originally intended to "foster physical health as well as civic involvement and cultural enrichment" (Merriam-Webster, 2021), the intent of PE has shifted to support students by providing them with a safe, supportive, and equitable environment where all students can express themselves and have fun while exercising (SHAPE America, 2015). Additionally, physical educators have come to not only focus on the physical dimension of a child's development but also on mental health, hygiene, encouraging more activities, and high levels of engagement. This ideal PE idea shows what PE should look like but is not always realistic. The reality of these main objectives are restricted by short lessons, limited blocks of sports, and are "associated with a core curriculum of sports dominated by traditional games, which are not reflective of pupils' needs or the wider movement culture outside of school" (Griggs, 2021, p. 2). Despite these restrictions, PE has moved from a focus solely on physical fitness to encompass all parts of a child's wellbeing (McAdams, 2015). Subsequently, PE has emerged to provide a space to encourage both physical and mental growth, and to educate students about positive body image and addressing that no two people are the same (Kennedy, 2019; Kerner et al., 2017). However, it is still an environment that can be negative to some students. There are situations and interactions that can trigger body image disturbances within the PE classroom (Kerner et al., 2017). Barriers such as dressing out and certain activities can cause low participation and uncomfortable situations for students creating negative body image ideas (Kerner et al., 2017).

Role of Physical Education in Developing Body Image

Beyond the impact that PE can have on a student's physical health during the school day, PE classes have the capacity to play a large role in forming positive body image with effective methods and strategies (Kerner et al., 2017). In particular, Kennedy (2019) states that, "adolescence is a

critical period of physical and emotional development, and problems surrounding body image often peak during this time" (p. 467). Educating adolescents about the importance of PE and providing them with ample opportunity to participate in PA for the recommended amount of time can be beneficial to their physical, emotional and mental health (Kerner et al., 2017). Conversely, challenges such as unhealthy attitudes and behaviors related to body image that are left unaddressed can result in body image disturbance and possibly more serious eating disorders and consequences (Springer, 2016).

Although the PE classroom may be an ideal place to foster a positive relationship with one's body, the classroom experience needs to be "quality" for it to be beneficial to adolescents. Blower (2010) notes that:

Quality physical education is not a specific curriculum or program; it reflects, instead, an instructional philosophy that emphasizes providing intensive instruction in the motor and self-management skills needed to enjoy a wide variety of PA experiences, including competitive and noncompetitive activity, keeping all students active for most of the class period and building students confidence in their physical abilities. (p. 1)

Gaudreault (2014) stated:

Reconceptualizing the physical education curriculum, providing 'cool PE' programs, and leaving 'old-school PE' in the past allows students to develop skills in physical activities they are more likely to engage in on their own and later into adulthood. If our goal is to prepare students to be physically active for a lifetime, this seems to be a critical component in our efforts (p. 2).

One aspect of developing a student's mindset, confidence and behaviors is PE (Blower, 2010). It helps students be prepared to be physically active adults, as well as giving students the opportunity

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to be active throughout the day at school (Blower, 2010). Physical education plays a central role in supporting adolescents to develop body satisfaction because it is the only school subject where the moving body is the main topic of learning in the classroom (Kerner, 2018). Schools should provide more opportunities for students to participate in PA and specifically PE (Kerner, 2018). This opportunity would give students more changes for physical movement "through practices that focus on the functional capabilities of their bodies, which provides opportunities to value their bodies as more than an aesthetic object" (Kerner, 2018, p. 13).

Association Between the Physical Education Teacher, Classroom, and Curriculum, and Body Image

Physical education and PA relate to body image and the factors connecting them. Factors include adolescents' self-esteem, confidence, and motivation and subsequent impacts on their desire to participate in PA in and out of the classroom (Gaddad, 2018). Research indicates that students who have a more positive view of themselves (e.g., body image) are more likely to engage in PA than those who see themselves in a negative view (Gaddad, 2018). Physical education teachers play a large role in their students' lives and can have a significant impact on the development of healthy body image. Kerner et al. (2017) notes that, "understanding how body image disturbance relates to young people's experiences of PE would allow for the development of pedagogical strategies to support pupils who experience body image disturbance in physical education" (p. 2).

The PE classroom has the potential to influence the development of adolescents both positively and negatively. While participation in PA is associated with lower body image disturbance and enhances positive body image, it can also trigger a negative response with adolescents (Kerner et al., 2017). More specifically, Kerner et al. (2017) states that, "lesson content has the potential to act as an activating event for body image" (p. 4). For example, when sports are presented in the PE

classroom, an adolescent's body is more exposed and there is a possibility for an increase in body disturbance. Another example of this is during a swimming lesson wherein participants were required to wear swimsuits. Kerner et al. (2017) revealed that, "exploring the experiences of adolescent girls at swimming pools reported girls' discontent with exposing their bodies, which was particularly relevant in the presence of boys, but girls also felt discomfort in the presence of other girls" (p. 5). Lessons in the PE setting that require adolescents to change have been shown to make them not want to participate or reveal that they utilize coping strategies such as trying to cover their bodies with towels and t-shirts. "This predominantly qualitative literature suggests that school physical education classes present several potential activating events that are likely to heighten concerns surrounding the body" (Kerner et al., 2017, p. 5; Kerner et al., 2018).

Implications of Addressing Body Image in Physical Education

In summary, evidence shows that the earlier teachers start promoting positive body image and daily PA, the better they will be able to handle their adolescent years (Springer, 2016). Educating both general education teachers and especially PE teachers is very important and might encourage students to have a more positive view of their body as they begin to develop self-perception and understand the importance of not comparing themselves to others. Physical education teachers have a duty to create a safe and welcoming environment that encourages PA in a healthy manner and to show and teach each student the importance of healthy eating, to educate them about their physical and mental health, and to teach them about respecting and being kind to their peers and adults (Murphy, 2011). This can be done through creating intentional positive social interactions through games, construction of the curriculum that enables development of physical competence, learning more about each individual in their class, and educating each student about their emotional, physical and mental health, and allowing them to talk to an adult at any point (Springer, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Physical education teachers have the opportunity to play a significant role in creating positive environments that promote and encourage development of facets related to healthy body image. These include physical competence, motivation, self-esteem, and confidence through the way they interact with students, develop positive learning spaces, and develop and implement intentional instruction and programs, thus, providing a space where adolescents begin to develop a healthy perception of their own body (Kerner et al., 2017). However, the breadth of literature on body image, what variables in the school setting impact body image, and how they affect adolescents within the classroom (general and PE) reveal minimal studies in relation to the impact teachers have on how students view themselves.

Study Aims

The purpose of this study was to explore PE teachers' experiences with body image and their perceptions and experiences with addressing and/or teaching body image in their classrooms and/or across the school setting. Furthermore, this study aimed to explore any perceived impacts of best practices and/or programs utilized in PE on adolescents' body image. The following questions were used to guide this study:

1. What variables in the school setting have an impact on adolescents' body image?

2. What best practices and/or programs can support positive body image in the PE classroom?

3. In what ways does the PE setting both positively and/or negatively impact body image?

4. How can physical educators support the development of positive body image in their classrooms and across the school community?

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore PE teachers' experiences and perceptions of body image through a qualitative approach.

Procedures

Settings and Participants

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the University of Mississippi on September 27th, 2021. Subsequently, this study took place between October-November 2021. A recruitment email stating the purpose of the study, how the study would be conducted, and the background survey was sent out to twelve possible participants on October 3rd, 2021. The possible participants were PE teachers who taught between 2nd-8th grade from different geographical areas across the United States. Even though the adolescent age was 10-19, participants within the study worked with children ages 8-14. The researcher included lower elementary teachers in this study to determine how young children started noticing body image as perceived by the physical educators in the study. Participants were recruited based on convenience as PE teachers who were easily accessible to the researcher were utilized within this study. Final participants included three female physical educators (60%) and two male physical educators (40%) with ages ranging between 26-68. Demographics included 80% Caucasian and 20% Asian (See Table 1). Participants were provided time between October 10th and November 26th, 2021 to voluntarily complete a short informational Google survey and sign up for a ZOOM interview day and time. The survey was attached in the email for participants to complete prior to the interview. This survey was utilized to understand each participant's background experiences prior to the interview (see Appendix A). Basic informational and demographic questions such as age, grade level(s) taught, and number of years they had taught in the PE classroom were asked within the survey. At the end of the survey, there was a sign up sheet

where each participant signed up for a time to participate in the ZOOM interview. There were 10 questions on the survey and it took approximately 5 minutes to complete. If participants did not fill out the survey prior to the interview, the researcher provided time at the beginning of each interview for participants to complete the survey. Within the recruitment email, participants were also asked to sign a consent form and release form regarding video and audio recording of the interviews.

The researcher communicated with participants prior to their interview day and time via email. The interviews were held via ZOOM, lasting 18 to 24 minutes. Participants were asked questions related to their experiences with body image at school, outside of school, and in PE. Data was collected via ZOOM auto transcripts and included participants from the Southeastern United States. During the interview, the researcher used a script at the beginning, middle and end of the interview (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

Interviews

This study employed a qualitative research approach to collect data from participants. Measures for data collection consisted of a teacher background survey that participants answered prior to the interviews (see Appendix A). This information provided baseline data and background knowledge preceding the interviews. The main source of data was acquired through ZOOM face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants. This type of interview was determined to be the most appropriate for a variety of reasons. This included the fact that semi-structured interviews provide adequate time for participants to share their diverse views and enable the researcher the opportunity to follow up with emerging ideas. Additionally, ideas obtained as a result of semi-structured interviews can be compared amongst each other since all participants are asked to share their thoughts around the same themes. Lastly, in a semi-structured interview, participants have

the opportunity to express their experiences through personal narratives (Nohl, 2009). This was important to this study as the researcher aimed to garner participants' personal experiences and perceptions of the concept under investigation, body image.

Within the semi-structured interview open-ended guiding questions were asked from a script that the researcher had prepared prior to the interviews (see Appendix B). Creswell (2004) noted that the use of open-ended questions enables participants to comment on their experiences without hesitation while ensuring there is minimal influence in regard to the attitude of the researcher or any preceding findings. Questions were developed with the focus of teachers' experiences and perceptions of body image in mind while also bringing out the themes of that focus within the context of different settings such as at school, at home, and in PE. This can be seen within the sequence of questions created in the interview script (see Appendix B). The researcher also employed follow-up questions during all of the interviews for clarification, to ensure there were no misunderstandings, and to enable participants to add to and/or elaborate on their answer when necessary. Each participant's identity was kept confidential and can only be identified by the researcher and her research advisor. All information provided by the participants is anonymous within the results section and the researcher coded participants in her data a participant 1 (P1), participant 2 (P2), etc.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio recorded via ZOOM and transcribed with the assistance of ZOOM auto transcription. Participants were informed prior to the interview that the information that they shared would be kept confidential and used anonymously throughout the results shared in this study. The researcher first read through the transcripts several times to identify any predetermined words that emerged frequently throughout the interviews and to gather a general sense of the overall meaning of the data. After reading through the transcripts the researcher met with her research

advisor in order to compare results and determine categories to move forward with. Both predefined

and emerging categories were used during data analysis. After identifying the categories the

researcher then began to create sub-categories within the qualitative data software, MAXQDA 2022

(QSR International). This specialized computer software assisted the researcher throughout the

coding process. Creswell (2009) states that although "the traditional approach in social sciences is to

allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis," it can be useful to employ predetermined codes

"that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research" (p. 187). From the sub-categories the

"codes" began to emerge which were then assigned to further segments of the data that revealed

similar qualities. This process of coding is defined as "the process of organizing the material into

chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information" (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). These

codes were then used to identify patterns and eventually themes in relation to the data. This process

was iterative and completed several times in order to enable the researcher to develop specific themes

that were interconnected to the study's research questions. It is also important to note that

interpretation of the data was done so through the lens of the researcher who brings "her or his own

culture, history, and experience" and therefore compares such findings "with information gleaned

from the literature or theories" (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). Growing up, the researcher experienced

harsh commands to perform intense physical activities at a young age. When the researcher was

unable to meet these demands, she was sent home with report cards with the words, "needs

improvement" and "unsatisfactory" written on them. Because of this experience wherein the

researcher often felt belittled for her physical ability, she did not have positive experiences. However,

the researcher chose to examine the strategies used, if any, to promote positive body image in order to

determine what could be done to shift the mindset of body image and make a positive impact in the

PE classroom.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Chart

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Current State of Employment	States Taught In	Grade(s) Taught	Years of Experience in PE
1	Male	40	Caucasian	Alabama	Alabama and Georgia	1st -8th	11 years
2	Female	26	Caucasian	Mississippi	Mississippi	PreK-2nd	3 years
3	Female	40	Caucasian	Alabama	Alabama	K-2nd	15 years
4	Female	68	Caucasian	Mississippi	Mississippi	7th-12th	30 years
5	Male	35	Asian	Mississippi	Mississippi	K-4th	10 years

RESULTS

A detailed analysis of each interview transcript was completed for all participants. In addition, the informational survey provided anecdotal information that was used to connect the participants' responses to their thoughts and experiences with body image throughout the interview. Upon completion of data analysis, three themes emerged and were categorized as follows: (a) promoting positive body image through health and physical education initiatives and pedagogy; (b) barriers to teaching body image; and (c) shifting the mindset to body positivity.

Promoting Positive Body Image Through Health and Physical Education Initiatives and Pedagogy

Throughout the interviews, one common theme emerged around particular methods and/or strategies participants used to positively promote body image. Participants referred to certain instructional and non-instructional methods and programs they employed as "initiatives to promote healthy and active living." This common theme was referenced by each of the participants when examining the positive and negative aspects within their PE programs and curriculum, particularly as it pertained to body image. The following conversation from participant four ensued regarding her thoughts:

> *Interviewer*: What factors impact adolescents' body image outside of the school setting? Do you have any examples?

> *Participant 4*: Definitely peers because outside of the school they are going to wear all kinds of different stuff, and that is where you start to see the true personality emerge. You see more of a person's personality more outside of school because of peer pressure.

Participant 4: And again, good health programs, well I prefer to call them 'wellness

programs,' because I firmly believe that wellness classes need to be the thing of the

future, not just a health class.

Interviewer: Is there anything you would want a health and PE teacher going into the field to

know about body image and adolescence?

Participant 4: It [wellness] needs to be part of the curriculum. I started teaching PE in 1976

and it has not changed. A lot of it is because when schools hire PE teachers, they are

not hiring PE teachers, but rather coaches.

Participant five also mentioned that his school is always seeking ways to incorporate health

and wellness programs and initiatives into the school such as "Project Fit" as well as partnering with

the "American Heart Association." He noted that his pedagogical approach is centered around PE

while adding in the "importance of mental health." Corroborating these thoughts the participant

shared the following:

…adjusting and centering the curriculum given around physical education while promoting a

healthy mind and body. I am big into mental health. For me, I am here to make the kids feel

good about themselves. I think it is very important that they mentally believe they can

complete the challenge and/or just be proud of what they have accomplished.

The following conversation from participant three explores these "initiatives" brought into the

school setting to promote healthy eating and active living:

Interviewer: Are there any methods, strategies, techniques, lessons, or programs that you have

used that have been particularly effective?

Participant 3: We have the *HEAL Program.* It is a big initiative that Alabama does that is

healthy eating and active lifestyle. It is like a whole encompassing, child friendly

introduction to health and fitness. It teaches children what it means to be healthy and teaches them how we take care of our body and that your body can be fit by doing lots of different things.

It is important to see the programs and initiatives used within the school curriculum as well as the pedagogy physical educators use within their classroom to promote healthy living while simultaneously promoting a positive view of body image. Throughout the following conversation, participant three discussed a strategy she uses within her PE classroom to integrate different aspects of health into the PE classroom:

…we incorporate nutrition into the physical education classroom. We do it to start incorporating health and awareness. They understand that in order to be fit they need to exercise and take care of their body. We want to make them aware that being healthy is not only to look good but learn to take care of ourselves.

Barriers to Teaching Body Image

There are many unknown barriers regarding why the topic of body image is either discussed or avoided within the school setting. However, there were some common themes that arose throughout the interview process that shined a light on the different reasons body image might not be a central topic of discussion or embedded into instruction within the PE classroom. Words such as peer relations, avoidance, uncomfortableness (teacher and student), dressing out, lack of time and knowledge, and self-efficacy commonly emerged across the participants' interviews. Participant one expressed his thoughts during the following conversation:

Interviewer: In what ways have you seen the school play a role in how students view themselves? Programs? Interventions? Counselors? Classes offered?

Participant 1: There is nothing that I know of that we do in our school. In our PE classes, we

do not really talk that much about body image. I say that much, we never talk about

body image. We talk about overall health, fitness and body composition.

Interviewer: So you mainly talk about overall health?

Participant 1: I would say the only thing really ever talked about is the dress code. Most of

the dress code things that they talk about mostly apply to girls. It talks about the width

of their shoulder straps, talking about the height of shorts or length of tights, etc. The

codes apply to boys too but boys generally would not wear those things anyway.

During the interviews, participants were also asked about the times during which they see students feel the least confident in themselves within the PE classroom. The common theme of having the student "dress out" or change into a required shirt and pants was mentioned across the board when lack of confidence was mentioned. One conversation with participant four put into perspective the negative effect "dressing out" had on body image as it pertains to adolescents as well as negative peer interactions. This example is reflected through the following conversation:

Interviewer: What factors in the school setting do you think impact a student's body image

either positively or negatively?

Participant 4: A classroom activity where a student had to get up in front of his or her

classmates and was not feeling confident about themselves.

Interviewer: So you would say "peers"?

Participant 4: Absolutely, and when you are talking about the PE classroom, that is massive.

Because they have to dress differently. When it comes to PE, more body is visible to

other people and we become more and more self conscious. I have seen this where this

impacts students with eating disorders because they want to lose weight, gain weight, or build muscle faster. I think those things influence their body image a lot.

While conducting interviews, teachers made it clear that there were many "uncertainties and uncomfortable situations that are presented when in the PE classroom" in regard to body image. The same participant in the conversation above also addressed "the importance of educating students on nutrition information" and "the many ways to stay active in order to bridge this gap between educators and students." This conversation demonstrates the barrier of avoidance discussed during the interview as it emerged through the participants thoughts:

…it is kind of the talk that I see or hear, and to be quite honest I try to stay out of middle school conversations and drama because it is just not healthy for me. They talk about each other's clothes, which is going to create not only physical but mental thoughts and make them think about it. I honestly do not see it as a real big issue in our classroom.

Another barrier mentioned throughout the participant interviews is lack of time allotted in a PE teacher's given amount of instructional time to address body image in the PE classroom. Participants throughout the interview process made it known that, "there is little to no health taught in the PE classroom." The following conversation focused on a young student whom one of the participants had in his class. The student was unaware of what she should "eat all the time, what you can eat sometimes, and what you should never really eat." This participants thought indicates the lack of time and its effects discussed during the interview as seen through this conversation:

…and I think for her and for a lot of middle schoolers and certainly elementary schoolers they are not taught this. They do not know any of it because there is no health taught. We teach PE. I am certified in health but it is not the class that I am teaching. In Georgia, before the economy crashed, they had dedicated health teachers in elementary schools there. So when in

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the PE classroom, they would also have health. This is where they would learn about all of this stuff. To be honest, our curriculum is so wide and so broad, it is very difficult to carve out time for health as well without limiting the physical activities that these kids do not get at home.

Some educators may be unaware of how avoiding the topic of body image can affect a young student and their overall health. On the contrary, there are also many educators that are fully aware of the effect avoiding the topic of body image can have on a young child and while they might want to intervene, they may lack the necessary skills and/or self-efficacy to address it in an effective way. When asked what advice they would give a future PE teacher, their responses reveal the different avoidances mentioned throughout the interviews conducted. The following conversation ensued regarding participant two's thoughts:

Interviewer: Is there anything you would want a health or PE teacher going into the field to know about body image and adolescents?

Participant 2: I feel like it would be very helpful to learn more about how to address it [body image] without putting ideas in their head or triggering it at all. Even how to have that conversation of like, 'do you think this?,' or ways to bring it up that makes them feel comfortable talking to you about it, without being the one to initiate the idea.

All of these above-mentioned conversations convey not only the barriers to teaching body image, but also the importance for physical educators to be knowledgeable regarding how to address it within their classrooms, whether it is organically or through a set curriculum that focuses on overall wellness.

Shifting the Mindset to Body Positivity

While there are certainly barriers to teaching body image within the PE classroom, it is also

something that can be viewed through multiple lenses and transformed through educators who are

committed to bringing about positive changes in regard to acknowledging the need for positivity

around body image. In alignment with this, one final theme that emerged throughout the interviews

was the idea of "promoting body positivity." She mentioned that it starts really young and "by the

time they get to second grade is when they start really pointing it out and it snowballs from there."

The following conversations focused on the shift in mindset of body image in her classroom by

modeling and creating a mindset of "body positivity" for children starting at a young age:

> *Interviewer:* Do you think how students view themselves is important during adolescence?
>
> Why/Why Not? In what ways?
>
> *Participant 3:* Yes, because it is such a formative time and kids are mean. Their perception
>
> combined with the social aspect they all face now can be very crucial in their
>
> development. It can really impact them for life. It could set them up for a lifelong
>
> struggle and I think it defines a lot regarding where they see themselves in the future.
>
> *Interviewer:* Is there anything you would want a health or PE teacher going into the field to
>
> know about body image and adolescents?
>
> *Participant 3:* It starts a lot younger than people think. I think that if we are waiting until
>
> fourth, fifth or sixth grade, we are too late. Students, especially now, need to be
>
> reminded about body positivity. Being interactive with the kids outside of school and
>
> seeing them around their families, we see all of these seven year olds with TikTok.
>
> This is a problem and they are getting all the messages, not only social messages but
>
> body image issues. They are getting it from everywhere. I think you have to go in and

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address it gently. You cannot go in and say 'we are going in and talking about fat

people and skinny people,' because that is not okay. You have to model it and be

active with the students. You have to set a good example. You have to model it and

recorrect their behavior. A lot of it is what they see and what they observe. You have

to go around certain topics and teach them health rather than what to do and not do.

The same participant went into detail about the way social media has an effect on adolescents

and the way they view themselves starting at a young age. She also mentioned that the girls on her

first grade cheerleading team have TikTok and "they follow cheerleader girls and they are looking at

the pretty girls that starts out harmless and then turns into that being the only thing they are seeing."

In the following conversation, participant three discussed the effect of social media and the ways she

transforms her students idea of body image into one that is not filled with false ideas:

…talking a lot about being different and that it is okay to be different. We try to show the kids

visual comparisons by telling them that both physical educators can run even though one

teacher may be a little bigger than the other. We talk about the differences in health. I look

different but it does not mean I am not healthier to give them that positive mindset. That being

different is okay.

Participant four went into detail about her class and lesson planning. In the following

conversation she discusses the different thoughts and activities she incorporated into her class and

lessons to help change the mindset to "body positivity."

Interviewer: Have you seen the school play a role in how students view themselves?

Programs? Interventions? Counselors? Classes offered?

Participant 4: Not really, programs were mainly around health. One of the main reasons I

majored in physical education years ago was because I felt like it had to be different

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and had to be better. As hard as I worked on that and what I did within my class, even today it is still 'go throw a basketball.' So I think that if anything happens, it happens in health class. While creating my plans, I would try to add in units such as board games to allow them to react intellectually because that is recreation. It is a lifetime skill and in PE, you want to teach lifetime skills.

Participants within this study mentioned the different ways they try and encourage body positivity within their classroom each and every day. Boundaries mentioned within this study may limit the connection between teachers and students, but physical educators keep moving forward to support the whole child every day in and out of the classroom.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to first engage in the research on body image in regard to adolescents, schools, and teachers. Secondly, after identifying gaps in the literature, the researcher examined the role of the school setting and PE teachers in creating environments for positively promoting body image through individual interviews. Ultimately, the goal was to develop a better understanding of ways in which schools and teachers can promote and encourage positive perceptions of physical competence, leading to a more positive view of one's own body (Kerner, 2017).

As revealed in the literature review, there is ample research on factors related to adolescents' body image. A majority of the studies found within the literature center on what factors contribute to adolescents' body image, both positively and negatively. Conversely, there is minimal research focusing on methods, strategies, and/or programs that can be employed within the school setting and how and what PE teachers can utilize to promote healthy body image development (Kennedy, 2019; Kerner et al., 2017; Murphy, 2011; Springer, 2016). In contrast to the majority of the aforementioned studies focused on factors affecting adolescents' body image, the research conducted within this study worked alongside the literature review to connect what is known about adolescent body image (i.e., factors affecting it) while also seeking to link to the deficiencies within the literature to explore avenues for new findings and approaches to exploring topics surrounding body image among adolescents within the school and PE setting.

One similarity identified between the results of this study and the literature was the focus on barriers to adolescents receiving information at school that promotes positive body image. As noted by Springer (2016), the issue around body weight stereotyping could partially be caused by educators who lack the awareness and/or have little to no training that could prevent negative body image. In alignment with this notion, several of the participants within this study noted that they

simply avoided this topic altogether as it was not part of their "regular" curriculum. Some also noted that they simply just did not have the "time" to make it a part of their instruction due to the amount of standards and skills they were expected to teach throughout the year in PE. However, one participant did mention that he tries to tie it into what he is "already teaching." The possibility of integrating it into the already mandated standards might be a plausible solution to the overburdened PE teacher who is bound by time and an insurmountable amount of standards.

Although some participants avoided the topic altogether, the notion of bringing in different programs and methods arose within both the literature and the results in a myriad of ways. During the interviews, participants revealed overall health-related programs such as "HEAL" and "Project Fit" that they utilize to address concepts such as body image through a comprehensive approach. This has ties to the ideas and framework embedded within the CSPAP approach mentioned in the literature review. The literature also revealed programs to address body image, however, they were usually more focused on single concepts that might impact body image such as "healthy eating" and "media literacy." Conversely, it was noted during the interview that programs which address overall "wellness" need to be what educators focus on in the future. This was also reflected by another participant who said that he chooses to not only focus on the physical aspect within his lessons, but also on the "mental health side" of the lesson. While this approach to teaching PE is ideal as noted in the literature, it is not always feasible due to a variety of reasons (i.e., teacher knowledge, school mandates, lack of time/resources, etc.). However, an integrated approach to teaching PE that encompasses "overall wellness" as mentioned by one of the participants might be a way to address body image, while simultaneously ensuring the rigor of PE is still kept intact.

While overall wellness programs that take a whole school and more comprehensive approach might be a valid path to addressing body image within the school setting, it is certainly important to

point out that many of the same single variables (i.e., factors) that emerged within the literature were also embedded in numerous comments throughout the interviews. Factors such as peer relations, social media, self-efficacy and family life were elicited throughout the voices of the participants in many of their responses as having a great impact on how adolescents perceive themselves. Not surprisingly, social media emerged as one of the most prominent factors impacting body image. In alignment with the literature regarding TikTok and its impact on exposing children to what the "perfect" image of men and women are supposed to look like, one participant mentioned that the girls on her first grade cheerleading team have TikTok and "they follow cheerleader girls and they are looking at the pretty girls that starts out harmless and then turns into that being the only thing they are seeing." This statement reveals that body image is not just something that appears during adolescence, but is something that is being formulated (maybe even subconsciously) at an early age through various technology and social media platforms as children begin to visualize what society shows them as being "ideal." While this is certainly not something that can be controlled, especially outside of school setting, one participant poignantly noted that she believes in turning around their negative thoughts into positive ones by reminding them that everyone is different and unique. This approach to incorporating body positivity through the use of specific language into the curriculum is certainly something that every teacher could easily incorporate into their daily lessons to address the constant images that children and adolescents are exposed to everyday on social media platforms.

Although several of the participants mentioned their experiences with indirectly addressing body image through programs, curriculum, lessons, and/or just casual conversations that emerged during a class, several seemed unaware of how to approach it and/or did not see it as an "issue within their classroom" and therefore did not broach the subject. Some participants in this study also noted that their students were "too young" to discuss the topic of body image and therefore avoided it,

which is in direct alignment with what was found in the literature (Kerner et al., 2017). Coupled with this notion of not addressing the topic of body image, Kerner (2017) describes body image as the "elephant in the room" and that most teachers avoid the topic instead of normalizing it (p. 8). This idea of body image being thought about, but not spoken about in the room was readily apparent in the following anecdotes by two different participants: One participant stated, "I do not want to put thoughts in their young minds," while another participant noted, "we do not really talk about body image, but rather go around it." Although several of the participants shared their opinion on children being "too young" to discuss the topic, another participant revealed that from her experiences, body image starts at a very young age, "a lot younger than what most people think." This is important, as many might think that body image does not play a role in children's lives until they reach adolescence, but findings reveal that we may need to start thinking about and teaching body positivity as well as promoting healthy habits within PE at an even earlier age than we think.

To a large extent the findings within the literature and the results of this study paralleled each other in revealing that physical educators confront many different barriers when addressing body image such as lack of knowledge, minimal time, and avoidance of the topic altogether (Kerner et al., 2017). While some participants noted the barriers that keep them from addressing body image, other participants provided programs they have used as well as individual methods they have employed to address body image either directly or indirectly within their classroom and/or school. Recognizing the barriers is the first step and then addressing such barriers to determine how to best address body image within the context of either one's school or classroom seems to be the next logical step as noted by several participants who have started programs within their school or individually addressed it in their PE classrooms through multiple methods. When educators recognize these barriers and

learn new skills and strategies to reduce these barriers, the ability to positively promote healthy lifestyles and a positive view on body image will hopefully prevail.

Limitations

While analyzing and reflecting on the current study, different limitations emerged. One of the limitations within this study is the limited geographical area of participants. This is because all the participants were from the southeastern part of the United States. The only views discussed within this study were therefore from the southeast and did not include participants from other geographical areas of the United States. The researcher acknowledged that views on this subject may be different in other regions of the country.

Another limitation within this study involves the time and setting of the interview process. The interview process was conducted over ZOOM and went from October 10-November 26. The researcher also acknowledges that conducting interviews over ZOOM may have limited the visibility of body language and small nuances that may have been more noticeable during a face-to-face interview.

Future Research

The topic of body image and pedagogical approaches physical educators use within the classroom to address this subject is always changing and improving. However, future research on this matter should explore how a student's body image might change expectations and attitudes regarding their performance in school. Additionally, conducting a longitudinal study with a larger number of participants over a longer period of time may prove beneficial along with using pseudonyms instead of participant 1, participant 2, etc. Moreover, conducting positive body image based interventions within the classroom such as, the Dove Self-Esteem Project and the "Body Positive Organization" may be an alternative method for addressing students' perspectives of body image as well as

acquiring more quantitative data that could help identify the best approach to increasing body

positivity among adolescents. Interviewing adolescents would also be an interesting way to garner

more information from the student's perspective. Lastly, interviewing elementary and middle school

teachers would be beneficial to future research in order to understand any similarities or differences

between the perspectives of each group.

CONCLUSION

This study centered on the topic of adolescents and body image. In particular, questions regarding what variables in and out of the school setting influence and shape one's body image and how it affects adolescents within the academic and PE classroom were explored. To answer these questions the researcher garnered physical educators' experiences and perceptions of body image and ways that they currently address or do not address it in their classroom or school. Examples of initiatives and pedagogy revealed in the findings indicated ways in which PE teachers can promote and positively impact adolescents' body image. While many barriers were revealed to addressing body image in the PE classroom, findings indicated that educators have the ability to take contextual situations that they encounter within their own PE classrooms and turn them around to promote body positivity by intentionally integrating it into their daily lessons. In summary, this study adds to the breadth of literature by revealing several solutions to addressing body image in the school and PE setting and by providing different areas wherein future research could be conducted to provide further insight into ways in which schools and PE teachers could be impactful by providing adolescents with spaces to either directly or indirectly address body image.

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APPENDIX A

Physical Education and Body Image Completion Survey

Survey Introduction:

My name is Natallie Noel and I am a senior at the University of Mississippi studying for a degree in Elementary Education. I am conducting research that is focusing on the impact different strategies, methods, and techniques in physical education can have on adolescent body image. The survey consists of 10 questions and will take no more than 10 minutes. This information will provide me with background knowledge on each individual before meeting over Zoom for a face to face interview. Each individual's identity will be kept confidential and will only be seen by myself and my advisor. The information will be used anonymously throughout my data collection and results of my study. Thank you again for your time and I cannot wait to speak with you personally.

Survey Questions:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Current State of Employment:
4. Current District of Employment:
5. Area of Primary Certification:
6. Area(s) of Endorsement:
7. Current grade level you are teaching:
8. Have you taught in the physical education classroom in Mississippi? If so, how many years?
9. Have you taught in the physical education classroom outside of Mississippi? If so, how many years?

Zoom Interview Script and Questions: Physical Education and Body Image

Into and Survey: Hello! Thank you for agreeing to take time out of your day for this interview. My name is Natallie Noel and I am from the School of Education at the University of Mississippi. I will be leading this interview and will be taking notes while we speak. I will also be recording the interview so that we can use it to create a transcript of our discussion. However, first I would like you to take the first few minutes to click on the link to a short survey if you have not already completed it. The link is in the chat feature of Zoom. I'll give you enough time to complete that and then we will begin the interview (pause for survey) (if survey was completed prior to interview skip to interview questions).

The purpose of this study is to explore the impacts of strategies, methods, and techniques utilized in physical education on adolescent body image. I will also ask you some more general questions in regard to body image in the whole school setting and also factors that may influence body image outside of school.

Interview Questions:

1. Body Image at School
- How would you define body image?
- Do you think how students view themselves is important during adolescence? Why/Why Not? In what ways?
- What factors in the school setting do you think impact students' body image, either positively or negatively?
- In what ways have you seen the school play a role in how students view themselves? Programs? Interventions? Counselors? Classes offered?
  - o   Or, does your school not discuss this at all with students?

2. Body Image Outside of School
- What factors impact adolescents' body image outside of the school setting? Do you have any examples?

3. Body Image in Physical Education
- Have you seen the topic of body image emerge in your health/physical education class? If so, how?
- Is there one type of body image concept that emerges more than others? (provide examples if needed: perceptual, affective, cognitive, behavioral).
- Have students ever discussed body image with you regarding their thoughts, feelings, and/or perceptions of their own body?
  - o   Do you have any examples of times you have discussed body image with a student or a class?
- How do you address body image, either directly or indirectly in your health/physical education classroom? If you do not address, can you explain why?

- Are there any methods, strategies, techniques, or lessons that you have used that have been particularly effective?
  - o How did you know they were effective?
  - o How did the students respond to them?
- Is there anything you would want a health or physical education teacher going into the field to know about body image and adolescents?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding this topic?

Wrap up: Thank you for attending this Zoom interview. Your responses are greatly appreciated in my research and discoveries on the effects physical education has on adolescents. Feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions. Thank you again for being part of this research and I loved hearing about your experiences!

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email

Subject line: University of Mississippi - Physical Education Study Request

Dear Teachers,

We are conducting a research project titled "The Exploration and impacts of strategies, methods, and techniques utilized in physical education on adolescent body image." The purpose of this study is to understand the positive and/or negative impacts different strategies, methods, and techniques in physical education might have on adolescent body image. I will be collecting data through a short questionnaire and via an individual interview over Zoom.

You are invited to participate in a brief, 5 minute questionnaire and one interview in either October or November, 2021. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. If you agree to participate, you will need to **click on the survey link below, read the information provided in the survey, and complete the survey.**

To participate in the interview you will need to sign up by clicking on the link at the end of the survey.

Click here to complete the survey
Physical Education and Body Image Completion Survey

Your responses to all questions are confidential and will not be shared with anyone in any way that identifies you as an individual. Please contact me if you have any questions about participation in this study. If interested please create a copy of both forms, fill out both forms attached below and email them back to me at nanoel@go.olemiss.edu.

Consent Forms
Consent Form

Release Form

This research has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board.

Your participation is truly appreciated.

Thank you