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ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

“You Don’t Get to Have the Same Experiences:” Youth with Disabilities’ Perspectives of Integrated Physical Education

*Katherine Holland, Justin A. Haegele, Xihe Zhu, and
Jonna Bobzien*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore youth with disabilities’ perspectives of their experiences in integrated physical education classes in the United States. Participants were three youth with visual impairments and three youth with orthopedic impairments (ages 10-17 years). Data sources were written prompts, audio-recorded, semi-structured virtual interviews, and reflective notes. Based on a six-step thematic analysis method, four themes were developed: (a) “I couldn’t do most things:” lack of accommodations; (b) “They had absolutely no clue:” the teacher’s role; (c) “I’m a scared boy:” concerns about injuries and unsafe activities; and (d) “I get to hang out with my friends:” interpersonal relationships and feelings of inclusion. Participants recalled feeling a sense of belonging, acceptance, and value when experiencing

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positive interpersonal relationships. In contrast, a lack of accommodations, safety measures, and a perceived lack of teacher preparation made these feelings uncommon.

Introduction

In the United States, physical education (PE) classes in kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) schools are dedicated to the “development of physical and motor fitness, fundamental movement skills and patterns, skills in aquatics, dance, and individual and group games and sports (including intramural and lifetime sports)” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). The goal of PE is to prepare students to become physically literate individuals, or individuals with the ability, confidence, and desire to be active throughout their lifespans (Society of Health and Physical Educators America, 2013). In addition to providing the only legal definition of PE, IDEA (2004) also mandates that all students, regardless of disability status, receive instruction in PE as a part of a free and appropriate public education.

In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated that students cannot be disqualified from receiving instruction in integrated educational settings based on their disability status. Likewise, many educational scholars have promoted the belief that segregated educational placements, such as self-contained classrooms, should be phased out in favor of educating all students in integrated settings (Stainback et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2019), leading to increasingly higher numbers of students with disabilities being educated in general education settings in recent years (Obrusnikova & Block, 2020). PE is often one of the first settings where this integration of students with and without disabilities takes place (Alquraini & Gut, 2012), and the literature indicates that the majority of students with disabilities are now receiving PE instruction in general education settings (Coates, 2012; Obrusnikova & Block, 2020, Wilson et al., 2020).

There are several ways that scholars have conceptualized this combining of students with and without disabilities into one PE class, with some referring to this arrangement as *inclusive* while others preferring the term *integrated* (Haegele, 2019). Many researchers have defined inclusion as a placement in which students with dis-

abilities are physically educated in the same setting as students without disabilities (An & Meaney, 2015; Hilderley & Rhind, 2012; Qi et al., 2016). In contrast, other scholars label the actual co-placement of students with and without disabilities as integration (Haegele, 2019; Haegele et al., 2020) and refer to the term inclusion as a philosophy related to the socially constructed environment within a PE class and how it relates to the subjective experiences that students with disabilities have within this environment (Hutzler et al., 2005; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010; Svendby & Dowling, 2013; Wang, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

It is important for scholars to “explicate the discourses of inclusion” (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 3) by revealing the conceptualization of inclusion used to guide their work. This study was conceptually guided by Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson’s (2010) interpretation of inclusion, as a “subjective experience [requiring] investigation from the perspective of the child who is ‘to be included’” (p. 275), meaning that one must understand this phenomenon from the perspectives of the child rather than using objective checklists, for example. This interpretation of inclusion was based on Stainback and Stainback’s (1996) definition of the term, which identified three hallmarks of inclusion: feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value. Thus, the term *integration* is used intentionally in this study to describe the educational placement in which students with and without disabilities receive instruction in the same physical space (Haegele, 2019), and *inclusion* is used to describe the subjective experiences participants described (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010) that led to their feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value (Stainback & Stainback, 1996), allowing the authors to keep the unique perspectives of the participants central when presenting the data.

Inclusion/Integration in Physical Education

Although the literature base in this area has grown in recent years, there are still gaps to be filled. To date, research examining perspectives of individuals with disabilities toward integrated PE in the United States has largely utilized adult participants reflecting retrospectively on their experiences (Haegele et al., 2019, 2020; Haegele & Zhu, 2017), rather than youth currently enrolled in K-12 schools.

In these studies, participants tend to recall experiencing forced physical exclusion (Haegele et al., 2019, 2020; Haegele & Zhu, 2017), inappropriate or non-existent accommodations (Haegele & Zhu, 2017; Haegele et al., 2019), and social exclusion by teachers and peers (Haegele et al., 2020; Haegele & Zhu, 2017). Retrospective studies are valuable in representing the meaning that individual participants placed on their personal PE experiences but may not be representative of the current state of integrated PE in schools (Haegele & Zhu, 2017). Research including youth participants' perspectives toward integrated PE has been limited in the United States, and more common in other places, such as Canada (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Seymour et al., 2009; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010), China (Wang, 2019), the United Kingdom (Hilderley & Rhind, 2012), and Norway (Svendby & Dowling, 2012). Like the retrospective studies mentioned above, these international studies also portray negative experiences for individuals with disabilities in integrated PE classes. Participants experienced restricted participation due to lowered expectations or inappropriate modifications (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Hilderley & Rhind, 2012; Wang, 2019), and discriminatory attitudes from peers and teachers (Hilderley & Rhind, 2012; Svendby & Dowling, 2012; Wang, 2019). In contrast, youth felt most included when experiencing positive peer interactions (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Seymour et al., 2009; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010; Wang, 2019). The authors in this study aimed to extend this body of research by exploring the perspectives of youth with disabilities toward their experiences in integrated, general PE classes in the United States.

Method

The authors chose to conceptualize this study through Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson's (2010) interpretation of inclusion, as they ascribe to a social constructivist worldview, believing that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences while attempting to gain an understanding of the world in which they live (Creswell, 2014). To investigate the subjective experiences of participants, this study utilized a qualitative descriptive methodology with data collected through interviews, focus groups, and written prompts (Sandelowski, 2010). Although all qualitative research is subject to some degree of interpretation, utilizing qualitative description, as

described by Sandelowski (2010), allowed participants' perspectives to be presented in a data-near manner in this study.

Qualitative descriptive studies intend to provide a straight descriptive summary of the data rather than the data as interpreted by the author (Sandelowski, 2000). Thus, the authors must acknowledge their positionality and work to minimize the impact of any potential biases through the addition of their interpretation throughout the data analysis process. The first (female) and second (male) authors both identify as white, able-bodied individuals with experience teaching adapted PE in K-12 schools before joining academia. Both the first and second authors acted as instructors during the adapted sports program from which participants were recruited and had previously established relationships with each of the participants. Additionally, they have each previously conducted research on the experiences of persons with disabilities in PE and physical activity contexts and are invested in furthering this line of research. Given the role of the researchers as instructors for the participants, the researchers ensured that no questions were asked that might be perceived to pertain to the adapted sports program, and that all conversation was directed toward their educational experiences to avoid responses influenced by social desirability.

Participants

After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval from the authors' university, participants were selected from a convenience sample of adapted sports athletes participating in a university-based recreation program at the authors' institution in the United States' mid-Atlantic region. The program provided cost-free, adapted sports opportunities, open to any school-aged youth in the surrounding community with a visual impairment (VI) or orthopedic impairment (OI). Total enrollment in the program was 35 at the time of recruitment. Of the 35 participants, only nine met the inclusion criteria of those who (a) were between 10 and 17 years of age and (b) had received PE in an integrated context with their peers without disabilities. The age thresholds were selected to ensure that potential participants were old enough to understand and respond to assent documentation, yet young enough to still be enrolled in K-12 schools.

To recruit participants for this study, a welcome letter, which included a description of the research purpose, protocol, inclusion criteria, incentive information, and contact information for the primary researcher, was e-mailed to eligible families before the first adapted sports program meeting of the Spring 2020 semester. Families who were interested in participating in the study were instructed to complete a demographic questionnaire that included open-ended questions about the age, gender, disability, race/ethnicity, and PE placement of the child(ren) with disabilities. See Table 1 for a summary of demographic data.

Table 1
Demographic Descriptors of Participants

Name	Age	Disability	Disability Note*	Acquired/ Congenital	Race/ Ethnicity*	Gender*	Physical Education Placement at Time of Study
Jesse	10	OI	Spina bifida	Congenital	White	Male	Integrated
Jordan	14	VI	B1; septo-optic hypoplasia	Congenital	White	Female	Self-contained
Kolby	17	VI	B1; visual optic-nerve hypoplasia	Congenital	Black	Female	Self-contained
Mark	13	OI	Osteogenesis imperfecta; scoliosis and kyphosis	Congenital	White	Male	Integrated
Norman	13	VI	B3; aniridia	Congenital	White	Male	Integrated
Usman	10	OI	Paraplegia; chronic lung disease	Congenital	Black	Male	Self-contained

Note: OI = Orthopedic Impairment, VI = Visual Impairment, B1 = blind, B2 = Visual acuity up to 20/600, B3 = visual acuity up to 20/200

*Participants self-identified their disability, race and/or ethnicity, and gender in an open-ended question.

Six of the nine eligible individuals, three with a VI and three with an OI (aged 10-17 years), volunteered to participate in this study. All six participants were United States residents, enrolled in K-12 public schools, and had congenital disabilities. Two participants identified as female and the other four as male. Of the six, two identified as Black, and the other four identified as white. All participants with OIs used mobility aids of some sort (i.e., wheelchair or arm crutches) and self-propelled, manual wheelchairs during adapted sport and PE participation. All participants with VIs identified as meeting the criteria for legal blindness (visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better-seeing eye with correction; International Blind Sports Federation, 2018). While all participants had experience attending integrated PE at some point in their K-12 education, three were enrolled in self-contained PE (PE class for students with disabilities only) at the time of data collection, and one did not attend PE at all at the discretion of his school administration (although he was a full participant in

the adapted sports program). Each participant was offered a \$20 e-gift card as an appreciation for their participation in the study. The incentives were intentionally kept small, as small monetary incentives have been found to increase participation in research studies without differentially influencing specific subgroups, which could potentially result in a biased sample (Kelly et al., 2017).

Data Collection

Upon volunteering for the study, parental consent and participant assent were obtained for all participants. The first and second authors then met with the families at the beginning of the first adapted sports program session to discuss the study and answer any questions that had arisen. Three data sources were used in this study: (a) written prompts, (b) interviews, and (c) reflective notes. Over the semester, the participants were provided five written prompts (one per month) that included one or two broadly worded questions focused on their experiences in school-based PE. Participants were asked to write as much or as little as they would like on the given topic and return the response to either the first or second author. These prompts were provided in either hard copy or electronic copy at the preference of the participant.

Upon completion of the written prompts, interviews were scheduled with each participant that lasted approximately one hour. Both individual and group interviews were used, based on the preferences of the participants. Two participants were interviewed individually and the remaining four were interviewed in dyads. One dyad consisted of participants with VIs and the second was comprised of participants with OI. These dyads were adopted because of the expressed preference of the participants. All interviews were conducted virtually using an online video conferencing program and were audio recorded. Each followed a semi-structured interview guide that included open-ended questions developed from prior research in the field and aligned with inclusion as conceptualized by Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010) and Stainback and Stainback (1996). Sample questions from the interview guide included: How do you feel about PE, how do you feel about your PE teacher, and do you think that having a disability influences how you experience PE? The first author, an instructor in the wheelchair sports portion of the recreation program, conducted the interviews with participants

with OI, whereas the second author conducted the interviews with participants with VI, as he was their primary instructor in the recreation program and the participants were familiar with him. Both authors took reflective notes throughout the interviews on the tone of the interviews, topics that stood out as particularly meaningful, and initial thoughts on emerging themes. These notes allowed the authors to return conceptually to the context of the interview during data analysis (Walker et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

After the completion of the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The objective of the transcription process was to provide a semantic record of the interview with a focus on the content of participant experiences; therefore, pauses and non-verbal utterances were not transcribed (O'Connell & Kowal, 1995). Written prompts, transcribed focus group interviews, and reflective notes were treated by the first author using a six-step thematic analysis as described by Nowell and colleagues (2017).

Nowell and colleagues (2017) described six steps for thematic analysis, which were initially presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six steps are as follows: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generate initial codes, (3) search for themes, (4) review themes, (5) define and name themes, and (6) produce the report. In step one, the first author immersed herself in the data by reading and rereading the written prompts, interview transcripts, and reflective notes to search for meanings and patterns. Then, she identified important sections within the data, attaching labels to begin indexing the content (Nowell et al., 2017). Once all the data had been coded, she completed step three, which involved sorting the relevant codes into themes. Codes that did not seem to fit into a main theme were set aside to revisit during step four of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). In step four, the first author refined the themes by rereading each piece of data and its accompanying code to ensure that it was categorized under the correct theme (Nowell et al., 2017). At this time, any leftover codes that did not support the constructed themes were discarded. Next, she scrutinized each theme to develop a title that best captured its overall scope and content, and lastly, she created a written description of each theme, using direct quotes from the data and relevant literature to provide depth (Nowell et al., 2017).

Constructed themes and associated data were reviewed by the second author, who agreed with the lead author's analysis, the presentation of the themes, and the alignment between the data presentation and the purpose and approach used in this study.

Trustworthiness

Credibility, confirmability, and transferability were addressed to enhance the trustworthiness of this study (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Credibility was supported through peer debriefing, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined as the "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). In this study, an impartial peer who was familiar with this line of research was sent the transcripts and finalized themes and asked to provide feedback. The peer debriefer agreed with the themes as they had been developed and offered suggestions on possible discussion points, which were then incorporated into the results and discussion section of this manuscript. Credibility was further supported by the authors establishing rapport and a trusting relationship with the participants before the interviews (Bradshaw et al., 2017). That is, each of the interviewers had established relationships with participants through participation in an adapted sports program. The authors addressed confirmability by recording reflective notes throughout the data collection process, providing a description of participant demographics, and maintaining transparency regarding their positionality with each other, as well as with the participants (Bradshaw et al., 2017). The first and second authors began each interview by resharing their positionality with the participants and revisited it as needed throughout the discussions. The presentation of sufficient methodological details to allow for the re-creation of the study by other researchers lent support to transferability (Bradshaw et al., 2017).

Results and Discussion

Four themes were constructed based on the data: (a) "I couldn't do most things:" lack of accommodations, (b) "They had absolutely no clue:" the teacher's role, (c) "I'm a scared boy:" concerns about injuries and unsafe activities, and (d) "I get to hang out with my

friends:” interpersonal relationships and feelings of inclusion. These themes are portrayed with narrative examples within the context of the literature below.

“I Couldn’t Do Most Things:” Lack of Accommodations

The participants in this study recalled many more experiences with feelings of *exclusion* than they did *inclusion* (reflective notes). Primary barriers to feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value that were shared by participants were a lack of accommodations and physical exclusion from large group activities. Historically, literature has shown that these barriers to feelings of inclusion can lead to decreased interest and participation in PE overall (Haegele & Buckley, 2019), as well as decreased physical activity later in life (Haegele et al., 2019). The results of this study suggest that these experiences persist and continue to be portrayed as new research emerges. An example from this study was Mark’s (OI) explanation that PE “wasn’t very accessible; I couldn’t do most things. My teachers never really made any accommodations,” (written prompt) which led him to feel like he was not a full participant in his class, diminishing any sense of belonging that he may have felt. He described how he did not feel valued when his teachers implemented activities that he was unable to participate in successfully, and “didn’t really seem to care what I was doing at all. They basically didn’t care if I was just sitting there” (interview transcript).

The lack of accommodations that Mark needed to safely and successfully participate in PE made him feel like an outsider. He said when you have a disability, “you don’t really get to have the same experiences as your friends in the class” (interview transcript). Experiences like Mark’s are not quickly forgotten, as feelings of not being a full participant (Haegele et al., 2020) and of teachers appearing not to care (Haegele & Zhu, 2017) have been described by adults with disabilities reflecting on their time in school-based PE as well. When viewed within the context of PE literature, the current results also hint at a larger issue—that these negative experiences have been happening perpetually for years without improvement.

Often, differences in experiences, such as those that Mark described, were exacerbated by the students with disabilities having to engage in activities in an entirely separate space from their integrated PE class, even though he was enrolled in that class. Jesse (OI),

for example, mentioned that he was asked to select a few peers to participate in alternate activities with him in a different room each time he attended PE (written prompt), making him associate any feelings of belonging with the smaller, segregated group rather than in his large group, integrated PE class. Likewise, Kolby (VI) stated that she would choose a small number of her friends to join her in the smaller gymnasium during her integrated PE time. She said that they “would do exercises, play catch with a big pink ball, sometimes play goalball, and race on scooters” (written prompt). When activities in an alternate location were not offered, some participants simply did nothing during PE. Mark’s (OI) first memories of this happening were during a month-long jump rope unit in elementary school, as he recalled that “one time I was actually handed a jump rope, I didn’t even know what to say to that” (interview transcript). Mark, who had limited mobility and always required a wheelchair, stated he sat with the jump rope and watched his peers for the entire duration of the unit, a devaluing experience that he relived later in his middle school years. Mark recalled: “When I went to middle school, PE wasn’t really accessible to me, and I usually just sat on the sidelines and did my homework. Or I didn’t even go to class. I just used PE as a study hall” (interview transcript).

Self-selecting to sit out rather than waiting to be forced to do so by teachers or peers has also been described in the literature in previous years, as some individuals with disabilities have expressed that sometimes it doesn’t feel as bad to be excluded when the choice is your own (Haegele & Zhu, 2017).

Like Mark, Kolby (VI) recalled experiences of sitting out and wishing that her PE teachers had higher expectations for her; however, rather than self-selecting to sit out, she described taking matters into her own hands. Kolby explained that she felt the low expectations her teachers had were unfair and “hindered my inclusion,” specifically sharing that “my teacher thought I could not play, so I had to sit in the bleachers while everyone else played” (interview transcript). Kolby described how she advocated for herself and offered her teachers ideas on how she might be successful, facilitating her inclusion. After requesting specific modifications to the activity, Kolby was allowed to participate with her peers (written prompt), fostering her sense of belonging within the class. Jordan (VI) had

similar experiences, expressing that “most of the time they’d [teachers] just not have me participate at all, which I don’t think is fair, because I’m not getting the same or any similar exercise and physical activity as everybody else” (written prompt). When Jordan’s adapted PE teacher came to see her, which she described as happening “rarely,” she was “pulled out of the class so that kind of made me feel like I wasn’t really participating in what everybody else was doing” (interview transcript). Overall, she felt that PE “wasn’t very adaptable, or accessible in any way” (written prompt). These experiences echo those of the participants in Fitzgerald’s (2012) study, whose teachers removed them to another setting when they had difficulty with an activity, rather than questioning the content or delivery of the PE curriculum. This study adds to the growing evidence of PE’s inaccessibility, which suggests that physical exclusion and segregation in PE classes decrease feelings of belonging and value for students with disabilities.

Interestingly, Norman’s (VI) experience was unique when compared to the experiences shared by the other participants, as he commented that his PE teachers mostly failed to address him or his disability. Norman shared that: “It’s not like my gym teacher ever talks to me. She just tells the whole class what to do and then sits at her table or talks to other gym teachers or whatever. She has said to me before that I don’t have to play because of my eyesight though. But I don’t want to be that one kid that’s like sitting out, you know?” (interview transcript). According to Norman, this lack of attention or accommodations made him feel excluded, undervalued, and like he “couldn’t do as good as everybody else” (interview transcript).

Unfortunately, Norman is not unique in this manner, as other students with disabilities have reported feeling ignored by their PE teachers. In a study by Bredahl (2013), for example, participants also described feeling as though their teachers did not listen to them, which often resulted in their withdrawal from class activities. PE teachers are central to the quality of experience for youth with disabilities and have the power to provide meaningful learning experiences through relevant and appropriate modifications and accommodations (Haegle & Sutherland, 2015). Thus, improving the perception of PE for youth with disabilities must begin with changing PE teachers’ behaviors.

“They Had Absolutely No Clue:” The Teacher’s Role

The participants in this study perceived that their teachers were unprepared to teach students with disabilities in integrated PE settings. This idea aligns with the findings of Coates and Vickerman’s (2008) literature review, in which they concluded that the experiences of youth with disabilities in PE were restricted by a lack of training for PE teachers and their support staff. Wang (2019) supported this notion and recommended that schools should provide financial support and training to improve the quality of PE instruction provided to these students. While they expressed unhappiness with the quality of instruction they received, the participants in this study were eager to explain that they did not think their teachers were unkind, or bad people.

For example, Mark (OI) said: “I’ve always had nice teachers. I just don’t think they were ever trained to handle someone with a physical disability. They had absolutely no clue what to do or how to make accommodations. It’s really annoying because, like, I’m able to do pretty much just as much as the other kids but with just a couple of accommodations. I could do most activities, but [the teachers] don’t know how to make those accommodations. Teachers need to be more informed” (interview transcript).

Jordan (VI) and Kolby (VI) both stated they felt as though their teachers’ inexperience negatively influenced their ability to be or feel included. When it was obvious to them that their teachers were unprepared to accommodate them, it made them feel as though they were not important, or of value, compared to their peers. Jordan said: “All of my PE teachers were kind people. I feel like they just didn’t have any previous experience with a blind or visually impaired student, so they didn’t know what they could do instead. I didn’t really enjoy having so little expected of me, especially knowing how much I can do” (interview transcript).

During their focus group interview, Kolby shared that she “felt like [her PE teacher] probably hasn’t worked with a lot of visually impaired people” (interview transcript), and then Jordan discussed the importance of students self-advocating for their participation. Jordan said that she felt comfortable giving her teachers ideas about what to do for her, but Kolby felt it was important to emphasize that “it’s the teachers’ responsibility to make sure they incorporate some

of those activities” (interview transcript). By putting effort into fulfilling this responsibility, PE teachers could increase the feelings of value that students with disabilities experience in their PE classes.

While some participants were eager to discuss ways to facilitate their inclusion, such as coordinating accommodations with their teachers, Norman (VI) expressed that he feared his situation was unrecoverable. He felt that his PE teachers were unlikely to change and said, “I don’t know, there is no helping it. I’m just going to, like, deal with this until I can get out of school. Like, please let this hurry up and be done” (interview transcript). These perceptions may characterize reality as research has shown that PE teachers often have little to no interactions with youth with disabilities during their teacher training programs (Hilderley & Rhind, 2012; Holland & Haegele, 2020). Hilderley and Rhind (2012) found that “teachers don’t have a true insight into needs of students with a disability” (p. 10), and a participant in a Holland and Haegele (2020) study disclosed that she had “no real idea” of how to interact with students with disabilities after graduating and obtaining her teaching credentials because she had never interacted with someone with a disability before (p. 10). The findings also align with Haegele and colleagues’ (2020) retrospective study that included participant perceptions that their teachers did not know what to do with or for them.

“I’m a Scared Boy:” Concerns About Injuries and Unsafe Activities

Most of the participants in this study described experiences of feeling unsafe in integrated PE (reflective notes), citing specific injuries that they had sustained during the class. Often, this fear of injury was brought on by a lack of appropriate modifications (Tanure Alves et al., 2018a). Kolby (VI), for instance, recalled the exact date several years ago that she was hit in the face with a basketball because she had been left under the basket while other students were shooting. She said that the incident changed her feelings about the sport, and she has not wanted to play it since (interview transcript). Norman (VI) feared this exact scenario and said, “Sometimes in PE I’m a scared boy and am always afraid that [a ball] is going to hit me in the face” (interview transcript). Likewise, Jordan (VI) described a similar incident that occurred when the PE teacher standing next to her during a kickball game to prevent her from being accidentally

hit by the ball, left her to go deal with another student. While he was gone, Jordan stated that she was hit in the chest with a ball so hard that it left a bruise, an experience that greatly decreased her desire to participate in PE moving forward (interview transcript). In this instance, Jordan perceived that her safety was not important to her PE teacher and that she was valued less than the peer he had left to speak with.

For Mark (OI), these experiences of getting hurt were frequent occurrences in PE. He said, “I’ve gotten multiple injuries from PE because the activities are just not safe. It came to the point where it was becoming too dangerous for me to even go there” (written prompt). He explained further that “every time I go, I get hit,” leading to feelings of frustration, anger, and being unsafe, resulting in his preference for non-attendance. Mark often felt as though he was intentionally targeted by his peers, which increased his feelings that he did not belong in the group. Descriptions of safety needs being left unmet for students with VIs (Bredahl, 2013; Haegele & Kirk, 2018; Holland et al., 2020) and OIs (Bredahl, 2013) are present throughout PE literature. Physical and emotional safety is vital for student success in PE (Healy et al., 2013); therefore, PE professionals must be diligent about reducing hazards and modifying their instructional practices accordingly (Holland et al., 2020).

“I Get to Hang Out with My Friends:” Interpersonal Relationships and Feelings of Inclusion

Research has shown that students with disabilities are more likely to make friends during the school day than outside of school hours when compared to their peers without disabilities (Seymour et al., 2009). These friendships are often fostered in PE, which can influence the perspective that students with disabilities have about the subject (Seymour et al., 2009; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010), helping them to feel included (Tanure Alves et al., 2018b), and potentially motivating them to participate more in PE activities than they would have otherwise (Li & Chen, 2012). While participants seldom experienced feelings of inclusion (see Themes 1, 2, and 3), they noted that these feelings were available in instances when they were able to interact with their friends during PE (reflective notes). Usman (OI), for example, enjoyed spending time with his two closest friends in PE, specifically because they were “always willing to pick

things up for me when I drop them” (interview transcript), which made him feel valued in his PE class. Having friends attend the same PE class also helped promote feelings of acceptance for Mark (OI), as his “friends know what I can and can’t do, and they respect that” (interview transcript). When he was participating alongside his friends, he felt accepted for who he was and did not feel as though he had to explain or apologize for the way he did things. Examples of self-supporting peer interactions have been commonly found to improve the quality of experience in PE for students with disabilities (Goodwin, 2001). When peers provide consensual, caring help, such as Usman’s friends helping him pick things up off of the ground, students with disabilities can maintain control, dignity, and autonomy in the exchange (Goodwin, 2001).

The participants appreciated having friends in PE classes largely for the social benefit and sense of belonging that resulted (reflective notes), which aligns with the value of friendship and camaraderie as described by Healy and colleagues (2013). Jesse (OI) identified interpersonal relationships as the biggest benefit of attending PE classes and said that his favorite part of PE was taking breaks to talk to his friends when he was tired, saying, “I feel included because I’m with my friends” (interview transcript). Similarly, Norman (VI) said, “PE is not that bad because I get to hang out with my friends” (interview transcript).

For all participants, the only feelings associated with inclusion that they experienced in PE were directly tied to socializing with friends (reflective notes). Interpersonal relationships have been found to play a key role in determining the quality of experiences for youth with disabilities in PE (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000) and are an important facilitator of feelings of acceptance, belonging, and value, as per these participants’ testimonials. It is important to note, however, that socialization is not the intended outcome of PE, but rather a potential benefit of participation. As such, interpersonal relationships should not be confused with access to the intended goals of a PE curriculum (i.e., to produce physically literate individuals with a desire to be active throughout their lifespan; SHAPE America, 2013). PE professionals should examine the content and delivery of PE curriculums for youth with disabilities and develop plans to use the benefits of interpersonal relationships as a tool for success rather than accepting them as desirable outcomes.

Conclusion

This study is among the first to interview youth in the United States about their current experiences of inclusion in PE. The key themes revealed not only what participants had experienced during integrated PE, but also how they felt about those experiences. Generally, participants did not feel they were accepted or valued by their teachers and peers in their integrated PE classes, which diminished any sense of belonging they may have experienced. The participants did enjoy the social aspect of PE but felt that a lack of accommodations, safety measures, and teacher preparation hindered their overall feelings of inclusion. Researchers should continue to explore the experiences of youth with disabilities in PE contexts, and specifically their feelings about the inclusiveness of their integrated classes. To date, the literature has been limited in the range of disabilities and geographical locations included. Future research should broaden this literature base to be more inclusive and encompass the experiences of a more diverse group of participants.

Limitations

Some limitations existed in this study. First, the authors selected participants from a convenience sample with whom they had previously developed relationships. These relationships may have influenced the degree to which participants were willing to share information about their experiences. It is possible that they were willing to share more because they were speaking with a trusted adult, or less because they viewed the authors in a role similar to that of a PE teacher. Participants were encouraged to share as much or as little as they were comfortable with and were reminded regularly that their answers would not be shared with their PE teachers. Second, the participants volunteered for the study after receiving a recruitment letter, and individuals who volunteer to participate in research studies may have certain similar traits (i.e., being outspoken about their experiences). These two factors may have increased the homogeneity of the group, thus decreasing the transferability of the findings. However, it is important to note that this qualitative descriptive study intended to present the experiences of a particular group of students rather than to provide generalizable findings (Sandelowski, 2000). The small sample size in this study might also be considered

a limitation by some. Small samples, however, have been found to allow for more intensive contact with participants in qualitative studies (Bradshaw et al., 2017) and are considered adequate if the research question is answered sufficiently and with detail (Fawcett & Garity, 2009).

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ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The Clash of Sports Officials and Fans: When Free Speech Borders Harassment *Higgins v. Kentucky Sports Radio, LLC* United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit

Alina Cioletti and Leeann M. Lower-Hoppe

Abstract

In the case of Higgins v. Kentucky Sports Radio LLC (2020), John Higgins was officiating an Elite Eight March Madness game in 2017, where the University of Kentucky (UK) was facing the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). After UK lost the game, Kentucky fans were upset and blamed Higgins for the loss. Two of these fans included Matthew Jones and Drew Franklin, a host and writer for Kentucky Sports Radio, respectively. Following the loss, Jones and Franklin criticized Higgins and his roofing business through their radio station. His business was bombarded with calls, death threats, and negative reviews. Higgins sought damages in excess of \$75,000 from Kentucky Sports Radio for inflicting harm through their commentary. The purpose of this law review is to examine the rights of sports officials and fans, summarize the case facts and court decisions, and determine how the ruling impacts sports officials broadly.

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Introduction

Sports officials have been around for centuries. The first emergence of sports officiating was at the ancient Olympic Games in 776 BC. The sports official position was a highly sought-after and important role, only reserved for the noble class. These sports officials, or ‘Hellanodics’, underwent extensive preparation before the Olympic Games, including swearing the oath of office to be fair and maintain the integrity of the Games (Duvinage, 2012). While sports officiating has changed over time (e.g., more accessible position, representing various levels of sport and qualifications) it still holds the same importance to the game and the spectator. Sports officiating also has the same goal—to preside over competitive sporting events and maintain the standards of play (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

With the growth of social media, the creation of instant replay, and the increased streaming access of games, fans are more involved in the game than ever before (Branch, 2019). The job of being a sports official has become increasingly more difficult. It has become increasingly more common for sports officials to experience greater criticism, be accused of incompetence, and be blamed for game outcomes. Sports officials are under the highest amount of scrutiny than they have ever been. Within the sport of basketball, although it is played between two teams, a third team has been formed: the officials. The purpose of this law review is to examine the case of *Higgins v. Kentucky Sports Radio, LLC* (2020) and discuss implications for sports associations, sports officials, and radio commentators.

Facts of the Case

On March 26, 2017, John Higgins was refereeing an Elite Eight basketball game between The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) and the University of Kentucky (UK) during the NCAA March Madness tournament. Scoring with less than a second left on the clock, UNC pulled away with a win while the UK coaches, players, and fanbase were livid with the outcome. Post-game press conferences and opinions from UK’s players and coaches were not favorable toward Higgins’ calls. Higgins was critiqued by John Calipari, UK’s head coach, in the press conference immediately preceding the game, saying, “It’s amazing that we were competitive in

a game where [the referees] practically fouled out my team.” Later, he said it was “amazing” that they had a chance to win. The heaviest criticism, however, came from Matthew Jones, a host for Kentucky Sports Radio. Jones criticized the way Higgins called fouls by calling the officiating “putrid” and referenced other previous matches in which Higgins was refereeing where Kentucky lost, saying Higgins had been “part of some of Kentucky’s most painful losses.” Soon after the game, the unsatisfied Kentucky fans learned of Higgins’ business, Weatherguard Roofing. An anonymous user posted a video titled, “John Higgins['] Sabotage of Kentucky,” and provided a link to Facebook at the end of the video to leave a negative review for Higgins’ roofing business. Although Jones did not promote the fans leaving negative reviews of Higgins’ business, he did devote airtime on his talk show to talk about his refereeing.

Another employee of Kentucky Sports Radio, writer Drew Franklin, published on the company’s website a series of articles that criticized Higgins’ refereeing. The following day, Franklin posted an article mentioning Higgins’ roofing business was “getting CRUSHED on its Facebook page.” Franklin stated that Kentucky Sports Radio did not condone what was occurring to Higgins’ business, yet he continued to reproduce comments that were fake and abusive toward the referee. Jones later referenced the comments that were falsified and abusive, saying that they were “funny” and asked “how many of those [commentors] would like to write” for Kentucky Sports Radio.

As a result of these comments, Higgins’ business suffered irreversible damage. Two days after the games, 3,000 calls were received, causing the voicemail system to crash. Thus, real customers could not reach Higgins and many false claims for service were surfacing. The reputational harm of the business dropped his ratings on Google by more than 3 stars because of over 181 false reviews that were created. He went from being the top-rated business in Omaha, Nebraska with 4.8 out of 5 stars to the worst-rated business with 1.2 out of 5 stars. Despite having a negative impact, it eventually led to threats to Higgins and his family. Of the 3,000 phone calls that were received to their business within the two days after the game, 800 of them were threatening. People were also calling the Higgins’ home phone, where they received 30 threatening calls. Of the 30 calls to their home, at least 12 of them could have resulted in criminal inves-

tigations. To stop the negative reviews and reputable harm online, Higgins shut down Weatherguard Roofing’s business page.

Case History

On Oct. 3, 2017, John Higgins, Carol Higgins, and Weatherguard, Inc. (“plaintiffs”) filed a legal complaint against Matthew Jones, Drew Franklin, and Kentucky Sports Radio (“defendants”) on the basis of intentional infliction of emotional distress, invasion of privacy, tortious interference with a business relationship or expectancy, and civil conspiracy. The defendants moved to dismiss the complaint for lack of jurisdiction. Once the case was transferred, with the court’s permission, the plaintiffs filed an amended complaint adding claims of negligence, harassment, and engaging in harassing communications. The defendants filed a new motion to dismiss, arguing the alleged tortious speech that gave rise to the seven complaints is protected under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The district court granted the defendants’ motion on the grounds that their speech was broadcast publicly (radio and online) and pertained to matters of public concern, and therefore, is protected under the First Amendment. In response, the plaintiffs appealed the case to the court of appeals.

Case Analysis

On appeal, the court reduced the seven complaints to a single theory of liability and deliberated whether the First Amendment freedom of speech and the press bars liability. The First Amendment protects radio commentators’ speech—including inappropriate, offensive, or controversial language—to promote the “free flow of ideas and opinions on matters of public interest” (*Hustler Magazine, Inc. v. Falwell*, 1988). To determine if the First Amendment shields the defendants’ speech from liability, the court first examined whether the speech involved a public or private concern. According to *San Diego v. Roe* (2004), a public concern is a “subject of legitimate news interest” or “a subject of general interest and of value and concern to the public,” whereas a private concern is everything else.

Public or Private Concern

When considering the subject of the speech, the court found the defendants’ commentary on Higgins’ officiating a matter of

public concern due to the prominence of the sports industry and the role of a sports official. College sports is a multi-billion-dollar business impacting athletic programs and spectators alike (Parrot, 2021). Success in the March Madness tournament can boost athletic recruitment and student enrollment while also engaging the public in dialogue, dispute, memories, and excitement (*Higgins v. Kentucky Sports Radio, LLC*, 2020). The entertainment value of sports includes commentary about sports, such as periodicals dedicated exclusively to sports (*Time, Inc. v. Johnston*, 1971). Officiating is a notorious topic of discussion among spectators and commentators, given a referee's call can decide the outcome of a game (*Mayer v. Belichick*, 2010). As such, commentary about sports officiating is considered a matter of public concern.

In the case of *Higgins v. Kentucky Sports Radio, LLC* (2020), the court determined that “just as commentators must be able to discuss the quality of the officiating, they must be free to comment on the fans’ reaction to the officiating.” In response, the plaintiffs argued the defendants “should have left [Higgins’] roofing business out of it” as it was a private matter. However, the court found Higgins did not treat his Weatherguard, Inc. roofing business as a private matter, as he used his visibility and status as a referee to promote his business through his website “rooferees.com.” Further, the court found the sports radio hosts discussed Higgins’ business in relation to his performance as a referee, not attacking the business outright. Therefore, comments pertaining to Higgins’ business were not deemed a purely private matter.

Higgins further questioned the issue of public concern by arguing the defendants’ commentary “fanned the flames of his harassment,” making the harassment a matter of interest to the public and thus subject to media coverage. However, the court found the fan harassment of Higgins’ officiating separate from Kentucky Sports Radio’s coverage. The radio station merely brought light to the fan harassment. Further, the court found Kentucky Sports Radio’s coverage justified by the high-profile nature of the game Higgins officiated, regardless of the commentary pertaining to Higgins’ harassment. Ultimately, the court found the defendants’ commentary on Higgins’ business also a public matter.

First Amendment Exceptions

Not all speech receives immunity under the First Amendment. Therefore, the plaintiffs argued exceptions to First Amendment protection: incitement to lawlessness and defamation. To demonstrate incitement to lawlessness, a plaintiff must show 1) the speech “explicitly or implicitly encouraged ... lawless action;” 2) “the speaker intends that his speech will result in ... lawless action;” and 3) “the imminent use of lawless action is the likely result of his speech” (*Bible Believers v. Wayne County*, 2015). Though the defendants occasionally approved “fans’ over-the-top behavior,” they did not specifically advocate for fans to attack Higgins’ business. The commentary came in response to fan harassment rather than inciting that behavior.

When considering the speakers’ intention, the sports radio hosts made at least six statements discouraging fans’ harassment (e.g., “We here at [Kentucky Sports Radio] do not condone activity from Big Blue Nation on John Higgins’ roofing company’s Facebook page”). However, Higgins pointed to a statement made by Jones articulating, “maybe [he and his colleagues at Kentucky Sports radio] were to blame” for notifying fans that Higgins’ roofing business uses the “rooferees” tagline. However, the court found this information to be public prior to the commentary, and thus was protected by the First Amendment. Higgins then argued that even if Kentucky Sports Radio discouraged lawless action, they did so with a “wink and a nod.” While sarcasm can transform protected speech into incitement, the court found Kentucky Sports Radio’s poor job condemning fan behavior did not mean they intended the harassment.

Next, Higgins claimed Kentucky Sports Radio should have censored themselves given the context of the Elite Eight game. However, the court clarified, “we cannot curtail a speaker’s First Amendment protection on the grounds that an otherwise permissible message might touch a nerve with an easily agitated audience,” describing the internet as a “vast and often unpleasant place” (*Brintley v. Aeroquip Credit Union*, 2019). Speech that reports on unpleasant subjects, such as controversial social issues, is in greatest need of protection. If unpleasant speech was prohibited, few people could speak freely. Collectively, the defendants’ commentary was found to not incite lawlessness.

In a surprise and seemingly last-ditch effort, the plaintiffs introduced the claim of conspiracy to defame. Moreover, Higgins argued Kentucky Sports Radio conspired with its listeners to defame him. To prove defamation, the plaintiffs must show Kentucky Sports Radio acted with actual malice because they are public figures and “that it knowingly made false statements or acted with reckless disregard for the truth of its statements.” The plaintiffs’ complaint merely demonstrated Kentucky Sports Radio repeated “potentially false reviews generated by other users,” which does not constitute defamation.

Court Decision

The court of appeals affirmed the district court’s dismissal of the plaintiff’s seven claims—asserting damages for unfavorable statements made about Higgins and his roofing business—based on the defendants’ First Amendment rights. In their closing remarks, the judges emphasized the difference between commenting on harassment and causing it, pointing to the First Amendment protections afforded radio commentators. For sports officials, such as Higgins, they caution, “those who step into the public limelight, even temporarily, must face the hazard that sometimes comes with it.”

Implications

The popularity of sports has continued to rise year after year in the United States. At the youth level, approximately 73% of high school students participate in organized sports (Aspen Institute, 2021), with parents and spectators increasingly invested in the outcome of games. While only 7% of athletes transition from high school to collegiate sports and only 2% of athletes transition from collegiate to professional sports (NCAA, 2020), viewership of collegiate and professional sports is widespread. In 2021, sports accounted for 95 of the top 100 programs watched on television (Karp, 2022). March Madness, specifically, has experienced a continuous increase in viewership over the years. The championship game in 2022 experienced the largest audience and the most minutes watched for a single game in March Madness history (NCAA, 2022). However, with the increase in popularity of sports comes an increase in scrutiny, especially of the officials. The *Higgins v. Kentucky Sports Radio, LLC* (2020) case illuminates strategies sports associations, sports officials, and radio commentators can take to mitigate harm.

Sports associations at all levels have an opportunity to directly and indirectly influence fan scrutiny of sports officials. As poor fan behavior has been found to contribute to the current shortage of officials (Niehoff, 2021), sports associations should be proactive in managing fans at the game. Dr. Jamieson (2021, para. 5) recommends six strategies to mitigate abuse of officials:

- Early detection and ejection of unruly fans
- Development of well-publicized codes of conduct
- Strict enforcement of codes of conduct
- Better ways to address player frustration and anger through training and coaching
- Increase the presence and action of security personnel
- Develop policies in support of state laws to better educate people on the consequences of their actions of intimidating and abusing officials

Directly addressing fan behavior during games may have a positive trickle-down effect and reduce fan harassment of officials outside of games.

To indirectly deter fan scrutiny of officials, sports associations can require heightened continuing education and facilitate regular sports-specific training for officials, such as pre-recorded demonstration videos and short quizzes, to increase officials' accuracy and consistency of calls. Officials can also be encouraged to watch the recorded games through video hosting services such as Huti (Hite, 2021) and review the playback of their calls and positioning on the court/field to assess their performance for future improvement. Lastly, the opportunity to officiate high-profile games—where fan scrutiny intensifies—should be awarded to officials who have performed the best throughout the season, rather than just the veteran and highly regarded officials, as we currently see in the March Madness tournament (Forde, 2022).

For sports officials interested in using their visibility/status as a referee to secure business outside of officiating, they must recognize their (potential) public figure status limits their protection from fan harassment, which can impact their business. By using online platforms to promote their business, sports officials open themselves up to negative comments and reviews—potentially fueled by fan retaliation—that can impact their business. Officials should be aware of

the limited protections they receive when hosting a business page on social media. For example, Facebook’s terms of service (2022) states, “We do not control or direct what people and others do or say, and we are not responsible for their actions or conduct (whether online or offline) or any content they share (including offensive, inappropriate, obscene, unlawful, and other objectionable content.)” A greater understanding of how a sports official’s public figure status can be both helpful and hurtful will prepare officials for navigating the public eye.

Radio commentators may also glean socially conscious guidelines for their speech from the case reviewed. Though the host and writer for Kentucky Sports Radio were found not liable for inciting lawlessness or defamation, the court elected to encourage common decency—using one’s platform to end harassment rather than aggravate it—which Kentucky Sports Radio fell short of. The First Amendment rights of radio commentators to engage in unpleasant speech is certainly reinforced by this case. However, commentators may consider the consequences of their speech and power to positively influence their listeners for a better society.

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ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Strategies for Adapted Physical Education Teachers in Connecting BRIDGES with Parents of Children with Disabilities

Adam S. Forbes and Martin E. Block

Abstract

Families are an important part of the educational success of children. They can provide children with the opportunities to participate in lifetime physical activities outside of the school setting. When families feel valued and welcomed, their engagement and satisfaction with teachers can become enhanced thereby developing positive outcomes for children. However, specific to adapted physical education, not all families perceive positive experiences with their involvement in APE such as difficulties in understanding APE services, approaching APE teachers, and how to support their children's physical activity needs. It is important for APE teachers to communicate with families and develop a collaborative relationship to demonstrate the benefits of physical activity and support families' efforts in recreational opportunities outside of school. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide

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APE teachers with strategies they can use to develop a partnership with families of children whom they support through the BRIDGES model. Explanations of each step within the framework are provided as well as examples APE teachers can use to start developing the home-school connection.

Introduction

Schools are comprised of numerous social exchanges among students, teachers, service providers, and administrators. In particular, interactions among school professionals and families can influence the development of collaborative relationships, which in turn can improve opportunities for children to have success in school. When families feel welcomed, respected, and trusted, their engagement and satisfaction within the school environment and with school professionals can become enhanced (Dinnebeil et al., 1996; Spann et al., 2003; Stoner et al., 2005; Stoner & Angell, 2006). As a result, their children can attain positive, educational outcomes (Boonk et al., 2018; Jeynes, 2003; Watson, 2012) such as improvements in self-concepts, attendance, effort, achievement, and motivation (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Santiago et al., 2016). Therefore, families are an important part of the success of children in school and as such, school professionals should make efforts in collaborating with families for the education of their children.

Over the decades, educational policies have recognized the importance of families in the education of their children with a focus on developing and increasing parental engagement within schools. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) states that parental engagement involves collaboration in school programming and student academic achievement as well as participation in school events. In addition, school professionals should develop the means for families to be involved (ESSA, 2015). Another policy specific to children receiving special education services is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). IDEA emphasizes and mandates that parents of children with disabilities be a part of a collaborative team whose purpose is to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for their children, which includes an Individual Education Program (IEP). Additionally, parents have the right to receive prior written notices of evaluations, meetings, placement decisions, or FAPE to

understand the education of their children. Teachers working with children who receive special education services under IDEA are mandated to collaborate with parents in creating IEP goals, communicating progress, and building a trusting relationship to derive commonality in the success of their children. Parents provide a unique perspective that should be acknowledged and valued by schools and school professionals.

Within IDEA, some children may receive adapted physical education (APE) services, which provide specially designed instruction by adapting and modifying PE instruction based on the individual needs of children with disabilities (NCPEID, 2022b). As part of the collaborative team, APE teachers support children in their physical activity (PA) needs. They achieve this task by developing knowledge surrounding motor development, disability characteristics, assessment, instruction and planning, and communication (NCPEID, 2022a). Since families have the right to be informed about the special education of their children under IDEA, APE teachers should develop a connection with parents by building a trusting and collaborative relationship. In building a relationship with families, APE teachers will have the opportunity to enhance parental involvement within and outside of school, facilitate parental efficacy in supporting their children at home, and develop a continuation of lifetime PA for their students with disabilities.

Although parental involvement produces positive outcomes for children, some barriers may impede involvement in APE and deter collaborative relationships with families. When asked about PA for their children with disabilities, some parents shared positive experiences regarding the value of APE in supporting their children (Chaapel et al., 2012; Columna et al., 2008) and how it created success for them compared to other educational settings (Kwon et al., 2021). However, other parents reported barriers to understanding what APE is and how it can assist their children's PA needs (Columna et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2019, 2020). Parents wanted to know more about APE services but did not know how to start the conversation, approach APE teachers (Lee et al., 2019), or ask appropriate questions regarding their children's PA opportunities (Chaapel et al., 2012). Additionally, there were instances of parents sharing the non-attendance of APE teachers in IEP meetings (Chaapel et al., 2012;

Lee et al., 2019) or APE services were not present within IEP documents (Lee et al., 2020).

Communication was integral to parents understanding what APE is, what their children were doing in APE, and how parents could help their children at home with PA (Chaapel et al., 2012; Columna et al., 2008; Kwon et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020). They wanted to develop collaborative relationships with APE teachers but did not know how to approach them or ask the appropriate questions related to community/recreational programs or skills to practice at home (Chaapel et al., 2012; Columna et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2019). Additionally, parents expected teachers to build relationships with them through effective and ongoing communication (Chaapel et al., 2012; Columna et al., 2008; Kwon et al., 2021), embracing and valuing their support (Columna et al., 2008), and to display respectful, open-minded, and personable qualities (Chaapel et al., 2012). However, with a lack of expectations perceived by parents of APE teachers, parental involvement was often absent in APE. With limited involvement in APE, parents may not know how to support their child's PA at home. As a result, children may not have the opportunity to engage in community/recreational activities outside of school to reinforce skills learned in school and develop lifetime PA.

APE teachers should facilitate the development of relationships and plan to work with families in becoming involved within APE. This will not only fulfill the legal requirements for parental involvement but also demonstrate the importance of PA outside of school and within their children's future. APE teachers are in a position to bridge the gap in communication to enhance parental involvement in APE, help parents have a clearer understanding of how APE services supports their children in school, and help parents learn how to assist their child's PA at home. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide strategies for APE teachers to develop relationships and connect with families of children with disabilities through a model called BRIDGES (Sawyer, 2015). The BRIDGES model will be explained in addition to how it can be applied in APE. Other models will be presented that supplement the BRIDGES framework and further foster collaboration between APE and families. For the purposes of definition, families and parents will be used interchangeably when mentioned, which include guardians, caretakers, etc.

BRIDGES Framework

The BRIDGES framework is a model that can guide teachers in developing and implementing strategies to support various types and levels of parent involvement (Sawyer, 2015). BRIDGES stands for Build, Recruit, Individualize, Dialogue, Generate, Empower, and Strengthen. These steps are intended to be flexible for teachers to use continuously throughout the school year and can be adapted to different school settings such as APE. This model will be explained in detail with practical strategies that APE teachers can use as they are developing collaborative relationships with families. However, the BRIDGES framework does not address time to reflect on the relationship with parents towards the end of the school year. This is a crucial additional step that will be added to the BRIDGES framework and discussed further in the following section. It is important to mention that APE teachers do not need to entirely change their responsibilities when it comes to supporting their students in using these strategies to build relationships with parents. Rather, the intention is to provide these models as a way to support and enhance the strategies APE teachers may already be using and to encourage the use of additional ones when needed.

Connecting BRIDGES With Families

Step 1: Build

To start connecting with parents, APE teachers should plan to make the first contact with the focus on building the foundations of the relationship. Although it may seem uncomfortable to approach parents, parents need to feel that they can rely on and trust APE teachers to support their children. The initial contact with parents can occur before the start of the school year or during the pre-planning weeks (Matuszny et al., 2007), as it may be difficult to reach out during the school year. Additionally, this is a time for APE teachers to create specific plans and strategies for developing relationships with parents throughout the school year (Sawyer, 2015). For example, an APE teacher might have a plan for ongoing communication through the creation of a Twitter account to share the progress of every unit or skill theme included in the school year.

APE teachers must make sure parents feel welcomed and comfortable during the initial contact. There are many ways to start these

initial contacts, including a phone call, email, Zoom meeting, or in-person meeting via school events or home visits (Columna et al., 2009). A welcome email is one way to start the initial contact with families, which can be sent at the beginning of the school year (see Figure 1) by providing a short introduction about the APE teacher and the definition of APE. This is an opportunity to discuss a teacher's background and role at the school (Matuszny et al., 2007), define what APE is in general and specifically for their child, how teaching sessions will be organized, and what specific teaching strategies will be used to support their child (Columna et al., 2009). It may be a chance to provide laymen's terms for APE in general and how it supports their child at school. An example definition might be:

All children receiving special education under IDEA must receive physical education (PE) regardless of disability. However, some children may not be able to successfully participate and learn in a general PE setting due to difficulties in focusing, physical limitations, understanding directions, or a combination of different challenges. This is where adapted physical education comes in. Adapted physical education (or adapted PE or APE) is specially designed physical education that supports children's physical activity needs in school through individualized and appropriate instruction. In general PE settings, APE includes modifying rules to an activity, adapting equipment, breaking down of skills into smaller and simpler components, or utilizing various supports such as visuals. APE also can be working with children with disabilities in a separate, small group setting or even one-on-one if that is what is best for a particular child.

Due to the nature of some itinerant APE programs with larger caseloads, making individual phone calls or emails to each family may be improbable. One solution is to collect parent emails within each school and create a group list on an email platform such as Outlook. When sending an email, teachers can select the recipients as the given group and create a blind carbon copy (BCC) email to families either attaching a general newsletter or written communication. A BCC email maintains privacy, confidentiality, and preference by sending individual emails to each recipient instead of a large group.

Figure 1

Introduction Email

August 23rd, 2017

Dear Parents of INSERT NAME

Hello!

I am Adam Forbes the adapted physical education (APE) teacher working with your child this year. I look forward to getting to know your child and working with you in supporting your child. Please take a moment to read over the following information:

Days and Times Your Child Has PE

Monday, Thursday, Friday
2:30-3:00PM

Supplies Needed for PE



It is important to ensure your student's safety and success in PE that proper footwear is worn for class. Proper footwear for PE are sneakers, running shoes, and tennis shoes. In addition to proper footwear, your child should be dressed in comfortable clothing that is easy to move in different types of physical activity that they will be performing in PE.

Parent Contact Information (attached)



I am a firm believer that communication between a child's PE teacher and parent is vital in ensuring their safe and successful participation in the PE setting. Please use the sheet attached to let me know the best way to contact you.

Parent Interest Form (attached)



In order to get an idea of what interests your child in terms of physical activity, please fill out the attached parent interest form. This is a way for me to understand your child's needs and what types of recreation/activities you do as a family and what things I can focus on during PE. This also helps me plan ahead for your child's future in creating goals for physical activity!

Please return the attached two sheets (contact info and interest form) and put into your child's school folder! And you may keep this top sheet for your records!

Thank you for your assistance in ensuring that your child has a safe and successful experience in the PE setting. I look forward to a great school year! Please feel free to contact me any time if you have any questions or you have information to share about your child.



Adam Forbes
Adapted Physical Education Teacher
[teacher email](#)



In this way, APE teachers and families will have a direct communication channel to respond and discuss without other families being a part of the conversation. Additionally, APE teachers can add their number so parents can easily reach them with questions or concerns. Regarding in-person initial contact, APE teachers can also attend back-to-school nights and meet families in person to build the initial relationship. Meeting in person may provide a better avenue to make introductions and to discuss APE, which may provide parents with a clear overview of how it supports their children at school. Whatever approach is taken for the initial contact, APE teachers should make it positive, friendly, and open when communicating with parents (Keller-Kyriakides, 2016).

Step 2: Recruit

After making the initial contact and introductions, the next step is to encourage and receive parental input and feedback to develop their buy-in toward APE (Sawyer, 2015). Once parents understand the benefits of APE, their involvement can increase in school and at home specifically to support their children's PA needs. Parents become involved when they feel their input is valued and welcomed. If possible, reaching out to parents to understand their beliefs about APE should occur during the first weeks of school (Matuszny et al., 2007). APE teachers can create surveys or questionnaires that can be included in a newsletter, webpage, or email (Sawyer, 2015). This is a good way to gauge family experiences, interests, strengths, children's interests, goals and values for their children, and expectations from APE services (Knopf & Swick, 2008). For example, Figure 2 provides a short survey designed to learn what families do for recreation and PA. Additionally, teachers can ask about family preference for communication, e.g., email, phone, text, and the best times to contact (Keller-Kyriakides, 2016) (see Figure 3). To develop ease, APE teachers can combine an initial email with the survey attached as well as an introductory beginning-of-the-year email and a contact information sheet. By providing the opportunity for parents to share their input and knowledge about their children, APE teachers can help parents feel they have a voice and an understanding of what occurs in school for their children.

Figure 2

Parent Interest Survey



Parent Interest Form

Please return this page in your child's school folder



1. What do you do as a family for recreation (e.g., play tennis, go for walks, go swimming)?

2. What activities do you see other children doing in your neighborhood that you think your child might enjoy (e.g., bike riding, soccer, t-ball, rollerblading)?

3. What community-based sport programs does your child participate in or that you would like to see your child participate in (e.g., t-ball, soccer, Special Olympics)?

4. Do you have any fitness concerns for your child that you would like addressed in physical education (e.g., endurance, upper body strength, flexibility, body weight)?

5. What other things would you like your child to work on during physical education (i.e., what would your dream physical education program look like for your child)?

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Step 3: Individualize

Once parent preferences and buy-in have occurred, APE teachers can start to individualize how they involve and engage parents. It is important to embrace a wide range of differences among parents (Sawyer, 2015) as they come from various backgrounds and cultures. The BRIDGES framework is not a one-size-fits-all model but should be adapted and modified for each family with a focus of building trust within the relationships. One way to develop trust is to recognize and incorporate families' identities, knowledge, and perspectives within their children's APE (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2015). As families are the experts on their children's strengths and needs (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2015), they should be involved in the education process. APE teachers can make parents feel welcome by addressing cultural differences in their classrooms and in the community (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2015). They should consider cultural customs, values, language, and leisure preferences (Columna et al., 2009).

Another factor APE teachers should consider is the potential barriers to involvement and communication in schools. Specifically, immigrant families reported difficulties in understanding what APE is and how it can assist their children's PA needs. Additionally, they did not know how to start conversations or approach APE teachers (Columna et al., 2008; Kwon et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019, 2020). Although cultural mismatches among families and schools may be present, an additional aspect that APE teachers should consider is the structure of schools, potential stereotypes and biases toward immigrant and minority families, and discrimination that parents may face. These are important factors for APE teachers to consider. By individualizing parental involvement, APE teachers provide the means for meaningful, and ongoing communication that serves to support their children's growth in PA (Sawyer, 2015).

Step 4: Dialogue

Throughout the school year, ongoing communication can help strengthen parent-teacher relationships (Keller-Kyriakides, 2016; Matuszny et al., 2007) and welcome opportunities for parents to be a part of their children's progress in APE (Sawyer, 2015). Although there are many responsibilities an APE teacher has during the school year, it is important to identify the easiest and most appropriate method for families to develop ongoing dialogue. Consistently

sharing children's progress in school outside of the IEP can facilitate meaningful conversations to enhance collaboration (Knopf & Swick, 2008). This gives parents a way to understand what occurs in school and have a voice to ask questions and concerns they may have. In addition, families can share information happening at home which may assist APE teachers when working with their children (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2015).

The most intensive form of communication is verbal. This involves making regular phone calls, parent-teacher conferences/check-ins, video call meetings, or home visits (Columna et al., 2009; Knopf & Swick, 2008), although it is understood that this may not be feasible for all APE teachers who have large caseloads. Another form of ongoing communication is written, which can include notes, checklists, newsletters, or communication journals (Columna et al., 2009; Knopf & Swick, 2008). Monthly newsletters are a good way for APE teachers with large caseloads to regularly communicate with parents. Furthermore, a unique way to create consistent communication is through technology. This could be sending emails, creating a webpage (Columna et al., 2009), or creating summary videos of each unit, skill theme, or individual child. A Google Site webpage can be created by the APE teacher to organize their responsibilities to support students and share information with families (see Figure 4). The Google Site can be saved onto a teacher's Google Drive to use at a later time. APE teachers can also create a social media account to document general overviews of children's progress in school relating to specific units, skills, or activities.

Figure 4
Google Site

APE Google Site

An example Google Site is provided below for APE teachers as a way to communicate with families.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eR4L4JSQe6hjS4GJTfdbi2Cpiojf3afm?usp=sharing>

Families want open communication with APE teachers and want them to value and respect their involvement (Columna et al., 2008; Kwon et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019, 2020). When APE teachers establish open channels of communication, parents feel valued and welcome to become involved in APE. Both teachers and parents can provide supportive information for the success of their children in school and at home. APE teachers should be open-minded, demonstrate respect, and listen to parents with the intent of understanding their perspectives (Sawyer, 2015).

Step 5: Generate

This section focuses on APE teachers developing ideas and resources for parents to identify and implement practices at home and in the community (Sawyer, 2015). APE teachers can develop strategies to address concerns and issues that may arise when parents support their children at home. It may include implementing home activities; creating materials for the home, such as a task analysis of gross motor skills; or sending useful information that occurs at school, such as skill components, goal checklist, or activities. Also, APE teachers can develop recommendations to share with families on how they can support their children at home. For example, a “tip sheet” of the overhand throw can be generated to share for the home environment (see Figure 5). Skill components can be broken down into simple cues used in school in addition to a visual representation of each component. As part of the tip sheet, at-home activities can be offered as well as community recreational opportunities. This can be shared via email, text, or social media. APE teachers can further enhance the parent-teacher relationship by providing the resources for families to engage in PA at home and in the community.

Step 6: Empower

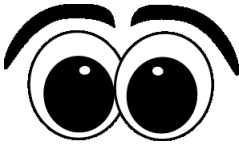
Empowering involves equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to develop confidence in their ability to support their children in PA (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2015; Sawyer, 2015). APE teachers have the opportunity to foster parental advocates for APE. There are many ways to empower parents, which can involve information sessions (Columna et al., 2009), training workshops (Kluegel, 2000), webinars, webpages, training videos, or video libraries (Sawyer, 2015).

Figure 5
Overhand Throw Tip Sheet

OVERHAND THROW TIP SHEET

Overhand Throw Skill Components

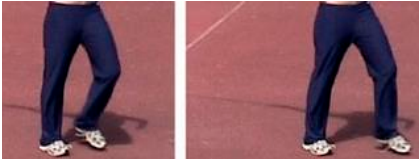
Use the following visuals and cues to practice the overhand throw at home.



Eyes on Target



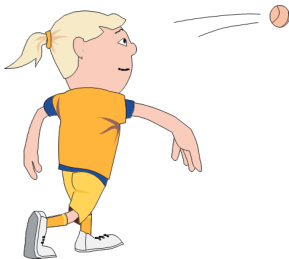
Make an "L"



Step



Point



Throw

Figure 5 (cont.)

OVERHAND THROW TIP SHEET

At-Home Activity



HOME CHALLENGE: BUILD AND DESTROY

PRACTICE YOUR THROWING WITH A GAME OF BUILD AND DESTROY

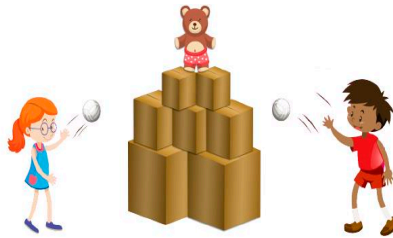
HOW TO PLAY

Build a tower in your house or backyard in a place that is safe to throw.

You can use things like boxes, toys, pillows, and cushions.

Stand a few metres back and throw balls at the tower, trying to knock it down.

Count the number of throws it takes to knock it down!



HOW MANY THROWS DID IT TAKE
TO KNOCK DOWN YOUR TOWER?

Equipment:

Balled up (clean) socks



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Figure 5 (cont.)

OVERHAND THROW TIP SHEET

Recreational Opportunity



The Little League Challenger Division provides athletes with disabilities the opportunity to play in an adaptive baseball program.

<https://www.littleleague.org/play-little-league/challenger/>

APE teachers can reach out to families about starting an after-school sports club with their children or work together in bringing adapted sports programs to the school area, such as iCan Shine bike riding. Another example is creating a webpage of resources developed to support families at home, which can include videos, teacher-created supports, and recreational activities. As part of the webpage, teachers can create videos of how they support children at school and how parents can do the same. Regarding training, APE teachers can schedule an after-school event for families to engage with each other in support of their children at home in PA. Topics can include prompting, visual supports, skill components, and home activities. Additionally, this can be an opportunity for parents to share their knowledge, hear each other's concerns and questions, and build a supportive community (Sawyer, 2015). Table 1 demonstrates some themes that can be planned during a training session on at-home activities for families.

Table 1
Parent Planning Session

Theme – At Home PA	Topics to Discuss
Ways to Engage/Prompt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving Choices • Timer/Countdown • Levels of Prompting (Independent to Physical Assistance) • Understanding skill components/cues
Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifying home items as PE equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Socks = Ball ○ Plastic Bags = scarfs ○ Empty Plastic Bottles = pins • Low-budget items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Balloons ○ Beach Ball
Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity Stations for families to participate in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Angry Birds (Overhand Throw) ○ Juggling Challenge (Scarfs) ○ Bowling (Underhand Roll)

Step 7: Strengthen

One of the most important aspects of the BRIDGES framework is maintaining and strengthening partnerships with parents. At the end of the school year, APE teachers can celebrate the accomplishments of individuals or groups of children to share with families. Additionally, acknowledging and thanking parents for their involvement in the school year can help motivate them to continue being responsive and supportive of APE. Throughout the school year, APE teachers can contact families to share their gratitude and appreciation for being involved and supporting their children in APE. An example can be hosting family events throughout the year, which could occur in person or online. This can be a chance to celebrate the efforts of families to engage within APE. Due to time constraints, scheduling events may not be feasible. APE teachers can send a thank-you email, letter, text, or phone call to families, sending thanks and appreciation. This can also occur during routine forms of contact, e.g., newsletters or social media posts. When families enroll their children in recreational activities outside of school, APE teachers can further strengthen the relationship by attending these events. When teachers extend their support outside of the school setting,

parents can gain a sense of the compassion and care an APE teacher may have toward their children, further enhancing the relationship. By going above the main responsibilities in supporting students in school, APE teachers can strengthen the partnership with families showing genuine care for their children and their efforts.

Additional Step: Reflect

Although not a part of the BRIDGES framework, APE teachers should take the opportunity to reflect on their relationships with parents at the end of each school year (Matuszny et al., 2007). Questions that teachers can ask are what worked, what didn't, and what must be added to further strengthen and improve the relationship for next year. APE teachers should also recognize their efforts to strengthen the relationship and celebrate themselves (Sawyer, 2015). A reflection sheet can be created for teachers to complete at the end of each school year. APE teachers can also create a reflection and feedback form for families to complete to further gain information on the relationship throughout the school year and as a basis for adjustments the following year (see Figure 6). Parents can either fill out the form or the APE teacher can speak with families via phone call to reflect on the school year and the relationship.

Reflections on Families and Itinerant APE Positions

When initially developing a partnership with families, some may be reluctant to become involved or welcoming to an APE teacher's efforts. This should not discourage APE teachers from developing a relationship with families or reaching out with information about APE. Additionally, this should not be recognized as a teacher's failure to communicate with families or a reflection of how families may feel toward them. Persistence may be required to engage with families as well as be accessible and flexible to families' needs. APE teachers should continue to provide information to families about what occurs in school and leave the channel of communication open whenever families are ready.

Due to the nature of itinerant APE positions, some of the suggestions provided may not be possible. APE teachers should reflect on their current caseloads, school responsibilities, and personal qualities when developing collaborative relationships with parents. Additionally, APE teachers should remember the uncertainty of

Figure 6

Reflection Form

Parent-Teacher Collaboration Review and Reflection Form

Directions: Please answer the following questions.

1. What helped you feel more comfortable working with your child's APE teacher? (Check all that apply)

- The frequency of information received (How often? _____)
- The way information was provided. (How was it provided? _____)
- Training sessions or school events
- Being asked about what I needed and how I wanted to receive information
- Additional ways: _____

2. What was not helpful in making you feel more comfortable working with your child's APE teacher? (Check all that apply)

- The frequency of information received (How often? _____)
- The way information was provided. (How was it provided? _____)
- Training sessions or school events
- Being asked about what I needed and how I wanted to receive information
- Additional ways: _____

3. Are there any additional ideas or feedback you have for how the APE teacher can help maintain your involvement and comfort in working collaboratively with them in the upcoming year? (You may use the back of this sheet to provide your thoughts and ideas)

Adapted from the Sample Review and Reflection Worksheet in Matuszky, R. M., Banda, D. R., & Coleman, T. J. (2007). A progressive plan for building collaborative relationships with parents from diverse backgrounds. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(4), p. 30.

maintaining caseloads every school year which may be subject to change. Efforts to develop relationships with families at a school that may not be under an APE teacher's caseload the following year can be detrimental to motivation. If APE teachers have a base school within their caseload, it is suggested that they focus their attention on developing partnerships with those families first. Additionally, teachers should not attempt to build relationships with all families during one school year. This can be a gradual process, with family-teacher partnerships created every year. For example, an APE teacher can have a goal of developing a relationship with five families throughout a given school year following or adapting the BRIDGES framework. Thereafter, an additional five families can be engaged to develop a partnership the next year. It is important to remember that APE teachers should maintain their workload balance in a way that does not overload their physical and mental capabilities.

Conclusion

The BRIDGES framework is one way that APE teachers can plan to develop a collaborative and trusting relationship with the families of children whom they support. They can adapt the framework to complement the ways they may already be communicating with families or follow the steps to begin developing collaborative relationships. By involving families in APE, teachers can have the opportunity to not only support their students' PA needs in school but also recruit families to provide recreational activities outside of school. Families can provide an avenue to support lifetime PA opportunities for children with disabilities. By using the BRIDGES framework, APE teachers can encourage families to become more involved in APE, develop an understanding of how it supports their children at school, and empower families to advocate for their children's PA needs.

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COACHING EDUCATION

Abusive Koaches:^{*} “There Ought to be a Law!.... Oh, Wait! There is!”

Craig Stewart

To fully understand this paper, the reader should know:

- youth/child is defined as anyone age 18 or under;
- level of sport includes recreational, developmental, and competitive sport in both scholastic (school) and private (club) participation; and
- ^{*}‘*koach*’ is purposefully spelled with a ‘k’ because, just as ‘krab’ salad, both refer to a weak imitation of the real thing.

‘The mind that becomes soiled in youth can never again be washed clean.’
Mark Twain

Abstract

The abusive coach has become an all-too-familiar issue at every level of sport. While sexual and physical abuses have justifiably received most of the notoriety, psychological abuse (PA) and emotional abuse (EA) by coaches are more common and often ignored, minimized, or excused ‘as part of the game.’ The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of abusive coaches by reviewing the importance of the player/coach relationship, providing legal and practical definitions of PA and EA, presenting the causes of abusive coaches, and demonstrating the legal and ethical duties of the administrators who oversee them. The author concludes with practical recommendations for the actions

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needed to reduce the occurrence of PA or EA and eliminate those who are guilty of either.

Introduction

Abusive coaches and their treatment of athletes have become an all-too-frequent occurrence in sports. The abuse occurs at every level and too often it is either ignored by those responsible for the psychological/emotional welfare of athletes or excused for some reason, such as:

- “Oh, but the team wins!”
- “The coach does that to motivate the team.”
- “The player is just overreacting and probably deserved it.”

While ‘*koaches*’ are often identified as guilty of emotional/psychological abuse, those who oversee them, and do not intervene, are as guilty as the abusers (Stratum, 2020). Both coaches and their ‘bosses’ (school principals, athletic directors, club officials, and board members) are legally defined as caretakers and, as such, are obligated to report the abusers in their organizations to legal authorities. The purpose of this article is to review the context in which most abuse occurs, the legal definitions of emotional/psychological abuse, its occurrence, the characteristics of the abusers, and the ethical/legal repercussions of those who allow the action to continue. It is concluded with practical recommendations for the identification and elimination of the abusive ‘*coach*.’

Literature Review

The Coach/Player Relationship

Jowett and Cockerill (2003) described the player/coach relationship as one that both parties have purposefully entered. The degree to which that relationship is positive, exhibiting mutual respect, sincere communication, and common athletic and personal goals will affect the physical and emotional well-being of all parties. Additionally, it will likely impact both individual and team performances. The relationship’s effectiveness will depend on how *success* is defined in the athletic program. Historically, the relationships between coaches

and their players are the substance upon which the effects of participation, success, and well-being are determined (Smoll et al., 1978). According to Jowett (2003; 2005) the player/coach relationship is the most important interpersonal bond in sport and is foundational for many of the positive results of participation. She noted that dynamic and complex partnerships can be either positive, characterized by mutual appreciation, respect, and gratification, or negative. Negative relationships often result in harmful experiences and impact the players' well-being. To ensure a positive relationship, elements such as empathy, honesty, support, acceptance, responsiveness, friendliness, cooperation, caring, respect, and positive regard must occur (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000). In contrast, negative relationships habitually involve coaches who display indifference and lack of interest in the individual athlete. Those 'koaches' are often remote or even antagonistic, deceitful, tyrannical, and guilty of verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse (Brackenridge, 2001; Jowett, 2003). The discord often originates from a coach's leadership style that exhibits a dominant personality, poor and/or negative communication, distractive and harmful training practices, and a top-down leadership style based on power (Jowett, 2003). These 'koaches' fail to acknowledge that players' perceptions of their relationships are based upon human affective, cognitive, and behavioral elements occurring simultaneously at every coach/player interaction (Jowett, 2001).

Ironically, the relationship between coaches and players directly affects the primary goal of most sports: the achievement of individual and team performance. That goal is the production of positive outcomes by combining improvement in skills and tactics with individual and team cohesion in competition. But to achieve that level, coaches must understand and accept that strong, yet respectful relationships between coaches and athletes must include mutual trust, understanding, and confidence. The coaches' abilities and willingness to listen, communicate, and prioritize the total welfare of the young athlete are essential (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020). Conversely, negative relationships may affect individual and team performances, coaching satisfaction, and player attrition and can often prompt legal and civil actions against organizations and their leaders (Greenleaf

et al., 2001; Hemery, 1986; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Vernacchia et al., 2000).

According to the National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) (Amaro, 2021), coaches in their organization are responsible for more than team and individual performances. In addition to their customary duties, coaches should be role models, advocates, and parent-like individuals with mandated responsibilities, including reporting any abuses they observe. Most districts have the resources to train school personnel on the legal obligations of their roles when working with student-athletes. These programs typically address signs of abuse, harassment, and the mental health of athletes and are offered at no cost through the NFHS Learning Center.

Bissett and Tamminen (2020) described constructive coach/athlete relationships as those that exhibit strong yet respectful levels of trust and understanding. Those relationships reflect common goals that include clear and honest channels of communication in a climate where all parties may express their opinions and feelings sans repercussions. Only in this environment can mutually clarified goals be pursued and achieved (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Lyle, 1999). Jowett (2005) concluded that the effective coach/athlete relationship is holistic. At its best, it is complete, well-rounded, and dependent on the commitment and maturity of all parties. Yet, accomplishing that ‘perfect fit’ between coaches and players is difficult because of the many variables that impact both groups.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse Defined

Psychological abuse (PA) and emotional abuse (EA) in sports are well documented internationally. Ridner (2004) defined PA as “the unique discomfoting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person” (p. 539).

Mountjoy et al. (2015) provided various sources for identifying types of PA and EA. They included the International Olympic Consensus Statement (Ljungqvist et al., 2008) on sexual harassment and abuse in sports, the Olympic Movement Medical Code, and a consensus paper on Youth Athletic Development (Bergeron et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, emotional and psychological abuse in youth sports may be the most prevalent type of mistreatment identified (Alexander et al., 2011; Bergeron et al., 2015; Raakman et al., 2010). Alexander et al. (2011) surveyed more than 6,000 youth participating in organized youth sports and found that 75% had been emotionally abused by their coach. In the *Consensus Paper on Youth Athletic Development*, Bergeron et al. (2015) presented a summary of the literature on the threats to children within sports. They found that emotional abuse may be the most prevalent concern within youth sports. *The Olympic Movement Medical Code* (2009) underscored that all stakeholders in sports affirm that no athlete should be endangered by their participation and that their physical and emotional health should be protected with respect, fair play, and sports ethics. It is the responsibility of every adult in a sports organization to take the measures necessary to protect the health of athletes and minimize the risks of their physical injury and/or psychological-emotional harm.

In the United States, Brassard et al. (2020) defined psychological abuse as a caretaker's repeated behaviors that impede the safety, socialization, emotional and social support, cognitive stimulation, and respect of an individual. Such abuse conveys to a young person they are worthless, defective, damaged, unloved, unwanted, or endangered. The negative behaviors assault many of the basic needs of youth, are insidious, and often enacted by those whom the victims trust (e.g., parents, family, school personnel, peers, coaches, and mentors).

Even more destructive to the athlete is that PA/EA usually does not involve easily identifiable visual actions and is difficult to document. Coaches who insult, threaten, mock, swear at, ignore, isolate, or exclude young athletes from meaningful events are examples of abusive behaviors (Brassard et al., 2021). When they occur in the developmental periods of young athletes, they often result in early adult psychopathology.

Legal Definitions

The legal aspects of abuse in sport have been addressed at various levels. Internationally, Brackenridge and Fasting (2008) reported that all sports organizations have a moral, ethical, and legal duty to adopt strict programs to protect athletes' physical and mental well-

being. In a consensus document from the International Olympic Committee, representatives of the U.S. and 12 other countries determined that abuses in sports usually originate from the power relationships between coaches and their athletes. The members stated that no sport, regardless of its performance level, is immune to abusive power relationships. Abusive behavior is a violation of human rights, regardless of its setting, and not only do the young athletes suffer, but the organizations' leaders who allow it may bear the ethical, financial, and legal consequences. In the United States, the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (2012) defined any abuse resulting in physical or emotional harm to a child and/or failure to act by a parent as illegal.

The study of the abuse of youth in sports is global yet highlighted more at the international level than in the U.S. (Kamal et al., 2019). Within the U.S., each state is responsible for determining child abuse and neglect, with many defining the four major types of maltreatment as neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse (Moxley et al., 2012). Most states have enacted laws and policies that define their responsibilities in protecting vulnerable youth from abuse and neglect. Issues addressed in laws include mandatory reporting, screening reports, proper maintenance, and disclosure of records. Accordingly, Logan and Cuff (2019) identified coaches and related sports administrators as 'caretakers' of athletes and, as such, are legally and ethically mandated reporters of any abusive behavior. Most states have severe penalties for both abusers and those who fail to report them to legal authorities (Stratum, 2020).

Conclusion of Legal Aspects

The lack of attention and responses to abusive coaches at all levels continue to be documented nationally. A simple search of the internet can document the abundance of cases of the abusive 'coach.' While unfortunate, it is necessary to include both the legal ramifications of those who abuse youth in sports and those who fail to report or even address such actions. The unending behaviors of some coaches and their administrative superiors are negatively affecting too many athletes at all levels. This abuse of younger athletes continues to be a common, yet undocumented, occurrence that many caretakers ignore or excuse (Stratum, 2020).

Origins and Characteristics of the Abusive Coach

Recently, Morbee et al. (2020), Fasting (2021), and Pulido et al. (2021) examined the origins and characteristics of the abusive coach. They labeled coaches' abusive behavior as non-accidental violence in sport and identified these as causal factors:

- gender of the coach;
- power relationship with their athletes;
- competitive sports environment; (*as an evaluative context*)
- growth of sports in the private sectors; and
- lack of coaches' educational preparation.

According to Fasting (2021), both genders exhibit abusive coaching behaviors. However, since males comprise much of the coaching profession, it is not surprising that males comprise the majority of abusive coaches (Knoppers, 1992; Matthews & Channon, 2020; Mohapatra, 2021). Those sources reported male hegemony, i.e., the control, domination, and power that exists in the coaching position, as a primary origin of abusive behaviors. Brackenridge and Fasting (2008) highlighted the 'power relationship' and its exploitation as underlying the abusive behaviors of coaches. Coaches who are 'controlling' often exhibit non-accidental violence, such as verbal abuse, belittling, bullying, threatening, shouting, and even physical punishment to control athletes' behaviors. Some of these 'controlling' coaches even believe their authority justifies imposing their will on the personal lives of their athletes. Such a high-pressure context not only relates to negative outcomes but may predict future coach-athlete relationships (Lundkvist et al., 2012). Negative coaching behaviors often result in athletes who exhibit competitive anxiety (Ramis et al., 2017), poor motivation (Haerens et al., 2018), and increased symptoms of burnout (Barcza-Renner et al., 2016). These represent causes that negatively impact both the health of athletes and their performances in competition.

The competitive sports environment of coaches and athletes has been labeled in an *evaluative context* (Morbee et al., 2020). In that context, coaches at every level are constantly evaluated by parents, administrators, boosters, and a society that places an overt importance on winning. When the primary measure of athletic success is winning, coaches are placed in a position of constant appraisal.

During any season, the evaluation process by external sources occurs regularly and too often based upon factors over which coaches have limited control. In this situation, many coaches experience the frustration of loss of personal autonomy, affinity, and competence. In the *evaluative* environment, coaches may respond by developing a controlling or pressuring style. Unfortunately, that transition can adversely affect the relationships with their athletes, and ultimately the performances of their teams.

Simultaneously, the explosive growth of youth sports in the private sector contributes to the evaluative nature of coaching (Merkle, 2013). Private sports associations and clubs have added to a sports environment obsessed with both winning and striving to elevate a minority of young athletes to higher levels of play (Westfall et al., 2018). Those advanced stages might be as simple as a specific position on a team such as quarterback, point guard, or striker, or as elevated (yet improbable) as college athletic scholarships or professional careers. Administrators in private sports clubs and associations foster and depend on those goals as a rationale for extended seasons, early sports specialization, and the increasing costs of their existence. The expansion also affects coaches' education (Gregory, 2017). Historically, most coaches were trained and employed as teachers in the schools where they were employed (Woodall, 2017). That is no longer the case. Initially, most coaches in the private sector were volunteers. Their responsibilities were limited with fewer obligations for extended seasons and expensive travel. Now, the need for coaches has grown and with that expansion, the needed resources in time, money, and dedication have expanded. Unfortunately, many of the coaches in the private sector have neither the resources nor the commitment to be involved in any form of comprehensive and ongoing coach education. Some private organizations do not require any educational preparation. Of those who do, their limited curriculum often has little basis in scientific knowledge (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Those authors reported less than 20% of the millions of youth coaches and less than 8% of high school coaches had any formal training in the non-sport-specific areas related to coaching. Even over 30 years, the formal preparation of coaches from high school (Stewart & Sweet, 1991) to college levels (Stewart & Koch, 2020) has not educationally progressed in any noteworthy manner.

In the 1991 study, many of the high school coaches surveyed were not successful in answering questions about basic first aid and/or a coach's legal responsibilities. Thirty years later, Stewart and Koch (2020) found that while over 90% of coaches from a major D-1 conference reported having college degrees, they had majored in non-sport-related disciplines like business, communications, or general studies. In surveying current and former athletes, coaches' lack of basic teaching skills was repeatedly reported as a characteristic of 'worse' coaches (Stewart, 1993; 1994; Stewart & Taylor, 2000). Logan and Cuff (2019) determined that many coaches may initially aspire to higher standards, such as sportsmanship, personal responsibility, work ethic, and other non-athletic components in their positions. Unfortunately for some, many factors have eroded the pursuit of those goals. The reduction of teachers as coaches, the excessive costs in time and money, and the primary determinant of success as winning, cause many to redefine their goals or ultimately quit the profession. Some who remain become coercive or punitive, encourage unsportsmanlike behavior or attempt to impede their players' social and personal development in pursuit of winning.

Those negative, abusive coaches often resort to motivational tactics, such as yelling, belittling, insulting, or name-calling, to a point where nearly half of the young players' attrition from sports was due to coaching misbehaviors (Shields et al., 2005; Stewart, 1993; Stewart & Taylor, 2000).

The Need for Education in Positive Coaching

The need for positive, ongoing coach education has never been greater. Yet, the status of coaching and coach education in the U.S. is still best described by Crum (2001):

Metaphorically speaking, never before have there been so many ships sailing on the sea of sport pedagogy research. However, it is a serious problem that too many of the helmsmen do not know the direction they are heading or the cargo they are transporting. Consequently, they are not able to inform fellow sailors about their compass courses or the practitioners on shore waiting their cargo about where and what they are going to unload. (p. 185)

Twenty years later, Carson and Walsh (2021) addressed the ongoing need for quality coach education. They noted that coach education has, unfortunately, been focused on the higher levels of coaching and overemphasizes ‘what’ to deliver with minimal attention on the ‘how’ to deliver it. The limited development of coach education at the grassroots or novice levels of sports is regrettable. It is at those entry levels where knowing *how* to coach (*teaching*) is more important than *what* to coach (*skills and tactics*). Understanding the methods of teaching would empower coaches to become focused more on holistic athlete development than on winning. Unfortunately, the loss of teachers who coach continues to be a serious problem.

In an administrative conference dedicated to drastic changes in public school coaching, Woodall (2017) addressed the challenges of finding and mentoring the numerous non-teaching coaches that exist in public and private schools. The loss of teachers willing to coach in their own schools was specifically noted. The hiring of individuals outside of the educational arena identifies weaknesses in coaches, such as the characteristics of young athletes, the basics of teaching, and the coaches’ willingness to learn, accept, and follow program rules and directives. Overworked athletic directors and/or other administrative staff in the schools have had to assume the additional tasks of educating, mentoring, and overseeing those coaches who are not teachers. When educating novice coaches, there is a need to be concerned with how they coach the athletes as much as what they coach them. In 2014, Stewart surveyed high school sports administrators (athletic directors and principals) to determine the reasons they had dismissed coaches in the past five years. Nearly 50% responded that poor teaching was the primary cause of the coaches’ dismissals. In other work by Stewart et al. (1992; 2000; 2011, 2014), students in an introduction to coaching classes, the majority who had been or were still athletes, ranked *being a good teacher* as their first preference in a coach. In addition, they described their worst coach as one who was negative, arrogant, yelled, played favorites, was a poor teacher, and lacked knowledge even in the sport of being coached.

Recommendations

The reduction and elimination of abusive coaches is a multifaceted journey that impacts the entire context of sport (Morbee et

al., 2020). It is a complex endeavor that is highly dependent on unified efforts to succeed. Coaches need both formal and informal education in the non-sport-specific components of positive coaching. Their primary education must be grounded in a supportive philosophy that puts the holistic welfare of the athlete first. Supplementary (and ongoing) education should be directly related to the 'context' of the position. There are multiple levels of coaching that have unique goals and aspirations. Sport at the entry level should be recreational where the primary goal for the young athletes is having fun. Later, sports may evolve to a developmental level where the skills, strategies, and rules of the sport are taught while maintaining a 'fun,' positive environment. Ironically, even in some programs at higher levels (freshman, junior varsity, etc.) or the U.S. Olympic Development Programs (ODP), developing skills and strategies should be more important than winning. Success at these levels should be determined by the athletes' progress and a lowered attrition rate. Winning becomes more important, but still is not the primary goal of participation. It is not until the higher levels of sport, where winning is essential to progress to a later stage of competition (regional or state tournaments; national championships; bowl games in the U.S. or international competition like the Olympics or World Cup) should success be determined somewhat exclusively to 'winning.' As sport reaches those higher contextual levels, coaches will experience more intense relational tension (Morbee et al., 2020) and must be prepared. Likewise, those coaches at the entry and developmental levels must cultivate skills and behaviors that reflect those differences. Coaches who have the mindset of the advanced levels of play, but coach at an entry or developmental level, will more likely experience the frustrations that lead to negative behaviors and/or coach attrition.

Specific Codes of Conduct

The primary administrative step at the entry level of any coaching position is the commitment to a well-developed code of conduct that coaches must agree to and to which administrators hold them accountable. The development of such codes should be a unified effort involving administrators, coaches, and athletes. Anshel (2003) noted that player input is extremely valid in providing feedback as to all aspects of an athletic program. In that vein, Kerr et al. (2019) presented a series of recommendations provided by former national

team athletes as to the content and atmosphere of any code of conduct for coaches. The following is an abridged version of those recommendations:

- The most frequent recommendation was the implementation of a third-party, neutral, independent body where athletes can go when they feel they have faced abuse, discrimination, and/or harassment.
- This independent body must be completely disconnected* from coaches or athletic directors, providing a site where athletes can disclose any negative experience and receive support even if they choose not to submit a formal complaint.
- *Too many members of an athletic coaching staff (including the director) have a self-interest that affects their ability to remain non-biased.
- That body should be neutral and contain individuals who are knowledgeable in both the codes and current laws related to abusive behaviors.
- The code and the committee should be prepared to address all forms of abuse with special emphasis on the prohibition of any intimate or sexual relationships between staff and athletes.
- There should be ongoing education containing the ethical and legal issues related to abuse that is required of all stakeholders on a regular (annual) basis.
- It should contain evidence-based information about the effects and abuses of power in the coach/player relationship and the role of the coach as a teacher.
- The educational process should emphasize the ‘implicit cues’ that often pressure athletes *not* to disclose any behaviors because of the negative effects on the school, club, and its administrators.
- The administrators in charge of the programs should strengthen accountability measures of all employees of the athletic programs with specific examples of abuses, and the repercussions to those who abuse athletes.

- The athletes in the programs should annually be asked for their anonymous input concerning the nature and quality of their athletic experience.
- There should be immediate access for athletes to support personnel who have the resources needed to assist and support victims of maltreatment.
- A final recommendation was the need for a recommitment to the primary goals of sports participation away from a performance model to the enhancement of the athletes' physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Conclusions

According to Amaro (2021), coaches are responsible for numerous aspects of their programs. In addition to the standard responsibilities, coaches should be role models, advocates, and parent-like individuals who have mandated responsibilities as reporters of any abuses they observe (Lyle, 2019). Many of these topics are covered in courses available for free through the NFHS Learning Center. Unfortunately, there is little to no administrative oversight as to compliance, much less the effect of educational efforts (Stratum, 2020).

When done correctly, coaching is a privilege (Mills & Mayglothling, 2021). Along with its many athletic and legal responsibilities, none is more vital than the moral/ethical development of the athletes (Lyle, 2019). Striving to achieve moral excellence in an ethical and empowering manner should be one of the primary goals existing in the player/coach relationship. In Mills and Mayglothling's (2021) opinions, coaches should know why they coach, what behaviors they should exhibit, and how their total being impacts the relationships with their athletes. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) identified honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness as the norms in coaching behaviors, not the exception. Coaches who place 'me' over 'we' in the player/coach relationship are likely to be viewed negatively and determined to be a coach who is more self-supporting, exhibiting a top-down power relationship with their athletes.

The coaching of any competitive activity is unique. Unlike the professions of teaching, medicine, or law, coaching is usually entered into with little or no formal education that addresses its requisite components. There are no specific qualifications to coach sports in the United States. Yet, legal, ethical, and professional obligations are

expected of each coach whether a volunteer of a recreational team or a well-paid professional. Not only are there external pressures at every stage of coaching, but within the profession, coaches exist in an open, evaluative atmosphere where they are judged regularly in an arena open to the public. The sports setting also forces competition against their peers, making cooperative communities of practice difficult to establish. To exist, and not just succeed in coaching, continual learning and critical thinking should be practiced. The welfare of sports programs, their coaches, and more importantly the overall health of the players depend on the identification and elimination of all abusive behaviors.

Yet, abusive ‘koaches’ continue to exhibit, often undeterred, their caustic actions, negatively affecting all aspects of the sport. The purpose of this article was to revisit the concept of abusive ‘koaches,’ not because their existence is rare, but just the opposite. The status of coaching has eroded to a point where the very existence of a coach who is hostile, negative, unethical, and unfair in dealing with their athletes is NOT uncommon. Too often, these behaviors are either ignored, excused, or rationalized by parents, administrators, and peers to a point where the psychological and emotional abuses are not even acknowledged, much less disciplined or corrected. The overall welfare of sports is dependent on drastic changes in the professions of coaching and those administrators who oversee them.

Epilogue

To quote the attorney for the victims of Dr. Nassar of the infamous U.S. Gymnastics tragedy, Mr. Mitchell Garabedian (MacPhillips, 2016), “If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one.”

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LGBTQ PERCEPTIONS

A Retrospective Examination of LGBTQ Students' Perceptions of Physical Education

Jamie O'Connor

Abstract

Approximately twice as many self-identified LGBTQ high school students report being bullied on school property than their heterosexual peers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Unfortunately, students who experience peer harassment are at an increased risk of depression and anxiety. Given that physical education is a context in which students should feel safe to explore health-enhancing behaviors, it is important to examine how LGBTQ students perceive this unique environment. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to qualitatively explore LGBTQ college students' perceptions of high school physical education. Six undergraduate students identifying as LGBTQ consented to participate in the IRB-approved study. Participants were formally interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes using a semi-structured interview guide grounded in a social-ecological framework (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Results indicate that participants remembered high school physical education as a toxic setting in which peer harassment was the norm. Participants also described that physical education teachers were ill equipped to address homophobic bullying, often ignoring its occurrence in both the gym and the locker room. The results of this investigation will hopefully illuminate the

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unique social-ecological reality that LGBTQ students face in the physical education setting.

Introduction

Scholars have a good understanding of homophobic bullying within general school contexts (Crothers et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2020; Pollitt et al., 2018). Unfortunately, LGBTQ students experience more harassment than their heterosexual peers (Kosciw et al., 2020), increasing their risk of absenteeism (Burton et al., 2014), depression, and suicidal ideation (Hatchel et al., 2019; Huebner et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2020; Zaza et al., 2016). Although research pertaining to LGBTQ issues in physical education is on the rise (Landi et al., 2020), more information is needed concerning the extent to which these marginalized students experience peer harassment in this unique educational setting.

To date, research suggests that physical education teachers are enabling homophobic bullying in their classes. For example, Gill et al. (2010) surveyed undergraduate students enrolled in an exercise science course. Participants responded to reflective questions about prior experiences in physical education. The results indicated that homophobic slurs were prevalent, with fewer than 10% of participants recalling any intervention from physical educators. Further, physical activity spaces, such as locker rooms, gyms, and playing fields, were identified as locations for harassment, particularly for male students. Further, based on survey data collected from over 16,000 American youth, it was reported that more than 40% of LGBTQ students avoid locker rooms and physical education classes due to feelings of discomfort and an overall lack of safety (Kosciw et al., 2020).

LGBTQ students who are coping with sexual identity development lack the protection and support not only of physical education teachers but also of such social-ecological entities as their peers, schools, and families (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001). Examining LGBT students' perceptions of physical education through a social-ecological lens (Espelage & Swearer, 2004) will enable scholars to understand the type and level of support they receive. Espelage and Swearer (2004) created a bullying framework that acknowledges the complexity of this social phenomenon. Episodes of harassment are not typically isolated exchanges between two people; they have over-

lapping influences. For example, although individual factors affect how a student engages in a bullying dynamic—as either a target, a perpetrator, or a bystander—peers, educators, administrators, families, and even community norms all influence how bullying is viewed by those involved.

Given that one of the primary purposes of physical education is to promote a love for lifelong physical activity, it is critical to examine how marginalized students in particular view their experiences within these classes. Unfortunately, physical education clings to heteronormativity and gendered representations of movement experiences (Clarke, 2013; McCaughtry et al., 2005). When students deign to buck that system of oppression, they open themselves to unchecked harassment. Physical education is one of the primary school contexts in which students are supposed to learn health-enhancing behaviors; thus, scholars and practitioners must understand how peer harassment impacts marginalized students. Therefore, this investigation aimed to qualitatively explore how LGBTQ college students perceive bullying—both homophobic and general—within their physical education experiences; the role that physical education teachers play concerning bullying; the type and level of support that LGBTQ students receive from school administrators, peers, and family; and the impact, if any, of bullying on students' perceptions of physical activity.

Method

This investigation was conducted as a collaboration between me and two undergraduate physical education teacher education (PETE) students at a midwestern university. This project enabled PETE students to experience the research process by writing an internal grant proposal, creating an interview guide, and collecting and analyzing data for the purpose of presenting the findings at a national conference. Given that scholarly hindsight is 20/20, I wish I could go back and collect more forms of data for triangulation, but I cannot. I can, however, acknowledge that this was a simple, student-led design that still yielded noteworthy results. Further, although it is arguably time to move on from retrospective investigations pertaining to LGBTQ people (Walch et al., 2020), it would not have been feasible to talk to LGBTQ youth in the small midwestern community in which we conducted the study. Therefore, we moved forward with our plan to

interview a handful of young adults who felt comfortable enough to share their experiences with us. By “countering the invisibility” of LGBTQ people’s experiences in physical education (Drury et al., 2017), we hope to contribute something of interest to the field.

Participants and Setting

After following appropriate IRB procedures, six participants were purposefully sampled through an LGBTQ resource center at one midwestern university. We opened recruitment to all undergraduates involved in this organization, recognizing that those students who had graduated high school most recently may have more vivid recollections of their physical education experiences. All participants signed informed consent forms before their involvement in the study. What follows are brief descriptions of the participants (using pseudonyms) with a few self-identified characteristics (using their preferred pronouns) that each deemed important during our conversations.

Rory was 20 years old when we collected the data. They were from a small rural town in the Midwest. Rory identified as a bisexual male (gender fluid) and has been “out” to family and friends since middle school. They also perceived themselves as highly motor competent, often “beating all of the other boys in sports.”

Ryan was 20 years old when we collected the data. They were from a suburb near a large midwestern city. Ryan identified as asexual and gender nonbinary but was not “out” until they began college. Ryan attended a small alternative high school due to the amount of harassment they faced while in middle school.

Patrick was a 21-year-old gay male from a suburb of a large midwestern city when we collected the data. He came out to family and friends during his senior year of high school. He perceived himself as “feminine” in high school, often socializing more with female students.

Sam was 19 years old when we collected the data. She was from a suburb near a large midwestern city. Sam identified as a lesbian and has been out since she was 14 years old. She perceived herself as a “shield” for targeted students while she was in high school.

Frank was a 21-year-old gay male from a small rural town in the Midwest when we collected the data. He has been out since he was a

junior in high school. Until coming out, he had carried himself with confidence due to his status as a track captain.

Joe was a 22-year-old gay male from a small rural town in the Midwest when we collected the data. He has been out since he was a sophomore in high school. As a student who had previously enjoyed physical education, he vividly recalled how he could no longer find a partner for physical education class activities once he was outed against his wishes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were formally interviewed on one occasion for approximately 30–60 minutes using a semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002). Questions pertained to the high school physical education class atmosphere, perceptions regarding harassment, and the type of support sought and acquired from various social-ecological entities. For example, we asked, “To what extent did you feel that high school physical education was a safe space in which to learn about physical activity?” We also posed the question, “How would your physical educator respond when episodes of harassment occurred in class?” Additionally, we recorded noteworthy informal interactions that occurred before and after the formal interviews. Throughout the investigation, a theoretical log was maintained to note emergent patterns and themes.

All open-ended interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Additionally, we used member checks during and after the formal interviews to provide opportunities for the participants to correct previously established assumptions, elaborate on their feelings, clarify and provide contextual relevance to answers, or make comments “off the record.” Any notes taken during the interviews supplemented the transcripts and helped with the interpretation of results. All forms of data were analyzed by open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documents related to the study (e.g., interview transcriptions and notes from theoretical logs) were continuously analyzed for evidence of thematic relevance and similarities and differences among the data.

Results and Discussion

In the following sections, we explore the themes and sub-themes pertaining to various social-ecological factors that impacted the par-

ticipants' experiences within high school physical education. First, we focused on the overall environment and the extent to which bullying was a reality for the participants. Next, we explored the participants' perceived support of physical educators, school administrators, families, and peers. Then, we illuminated a theme related to participant empathy toward those who failed to protect them during high school physical education. Finally, we highlighted the overall impact, if any, that the participants' experiences had on their current physical activity habits.

A Toxic Setting

Using a social-ecological lens (Espelage & Swearer, 2004) to examine how LGBTQ students perceived bullying provided a rich opportunity to explore the layers of influence and support within the context of physical education. Questions were posed pertaining to participants' recollections of high school physical education and, more specifically, to examples of harassment experienced or observed during those years. Similar to other research (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021; O'Connor & Graber, 2014;), participants described their physical education settings as toxic, with memories arising related to frequent name-calling, physical harassment, and a general lack of protection from physical educators. Words and phrases heard frequently in physical education included, *don't be a girl* (directed toward males), *sissy boy*, *dyke*, and various iterations of *faggot*. When asked to describe the overall physical education atmosphere, Frank articulated, "I would say, very homophobic, very hypermasculine, and then led by people who are not able . . . or willing to engage in those conversations." The notion of a hypermasculine physical education climate, which was echoed by each participant, has been illuminated by prior research (Clarke, 2013; Sykes, 2004).

The participants, who were at the center of their social ecology, described why they and others were targeted more often within the physical education setting. Participants indicated that students were bullied in high school physical education most often because of their perceived sexual orientation and gender nonconformity (Clarke, 2013; Hargie et al., 2017; Sykes, 2004), lower social standing, and lack of athleticism. Patrick stated, "I just wanted to get out and go to a different class because I didn't excel in it, and there were people that were like, 'You aren't as athletic as we are, so we are just going to

take you down.” Further, participants described the occurrence of physical harassment (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021), intimidation, verbal abuse (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009; Symons et al., 2014), and social isolation (O’Connor & Graber, 2014) in most physical education spaces, most notably the locker room. Prior research has identified locker rooms as hotbeds for harassment, often due to a lack of appropriate supervision and the discomfort around bodies in those spaces (Hargie et al., 2017). Rory stated, “We had a three-tier locker system, and I was in the middle, and I was the only one out of 15 other boys. . . . They chose the other two sides [rows], so they never had to stand by me because I was the only out person in my whole entire high school. . . . If they had a boy they didn’t like, they would try to force him to change next to me as if it was some form of punishment.” Others shared feelings of dread about the locker room. Patrick emphasized, “I remember always changing as fast as I could and getting out. . . . It wasn’t the place where I ever wanted to be.” Frank described being physically attacked in the locker room by football players accusing him of “checking them out.” Although Anderson (2012) has posited that “homophobia” has decreased over the years, other scholars contend that locker rooms remain spaces for policing sexual and gender norms (Atkinson & Kehler, 2010; White & Hobson, 2015).

An Exception to the Rule

Interestingly, participants suggested that respect or protection could be gained from peers and physical educators if one had athletic aptitude. To a certain extent, athleticism superseded one’s sexuality or gender nonconformity. For example, Rory described how they earned the respect of their physical educator by dominating peers athletically in class: “The actual high school teacher who was in charge of the gym classes, he ended up calling me [Last Name] by the end of my senior year and showing me respect in the way that, like, when you call a basketball player by their last name.” In a Finnish investigation (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021), secondary physical educators observed that LGBTQ students who were “sporty and strong” carried more social capital in their classes than those who were “timid.” Further, Wellard (2006) has suggested that gay males, in particular, can achieve acceptance in sporting environments *if* they embody heteronormative gender ideals. Frank was captain of

the track team and perceived that he was well-liked and accepted by his peers before coming out: “I am six feet tall. . . . I felt OK and that I had some power in those situations because of being captain of teams. I did [feel safe] right up until I got beat up [for being gay].” For Frank, the fact that he “came out” diminished whatever social capital he had acquired for being a respected athlete, contrary to Wellard’s (2006) findings.

Sam indicated that her athleticism helped buffer harassment in some ways, enabling her to act as a shield for her friends who were teased more frequently. “Since I was a swimmer, I had a bit of power. . . . I was friends with the victims, and I sat with them at lunch, and if somebody was sitting alone . . . then I would bring my friends over and sit with them.” Ryan described how they felt safe from a verbally and physically violent student in class because they were protected by the teacher—for basketball-related purposes. The teacher, who was also the head basketball coach, did not want Ryan to get hurt because they were needed as the star of the varsity team. The teacher intervened when the bully, who was notorious for harassing others, approached Ryan in physically intimidating ways. Ryan perceived that the “supportive” teacher was protecting their athletic ability rather than their sense of well-being or identity. Ryan also reported that they felt more confident in physical education than in other high school classes. They stated, “[PE] is the one place where I didn’t necessarily feel like a victim because I was empowered by my athleticism in that class. . . . Besting people at sports gave me a round of confidence that I didn’t possess elsewhere.”

Perceived Support

Physical Educators

Teachers play a critical role in the social ecology of physical education classes. They set the tone for interpersonal expectations and can intentionally or unintentionally promote unwanted harassment or social isolation. Even though some physical educators in this investigation offered some level of support to LGBTQ participants, this was the exception, not the rule. When asked to describe the role physical educators played when bullying occurred in class, participants indicated that the targets of harassment were left to protect themselves (Clarke, 2013; Hargie et al., 2017; Larrison et al., 2011).

For example, Frank stated, “There was a lot of conversation about being a man and that hyper toxic masculinity that was encouraged in us when someone said something derogatory or that would make that space not safe—we were told to ‘man up’ and ‘deal with it.’”

While participants were often encouraged to “man up” and face bullying on their own, at other times, bullying events in physical education were ignored or downplayed. Joe offered, “He would choose not to hear a lot [verbal bullying], and after a while, I figured that was his motive. . . He doesn’t care as long as they are doing the activities.” Although Joe did enjoy the physical education curriculum organized by the teacher, he did not turn to this individual for help or guidance related to the social ostracism he was experiencing in class. Another participant, Sam, worried that because of the experience of a close friend who was physically barred by students from entering the locker room due to his status as an “out” gay male, nothing would be different for her. Another friend, who was merely perceived to be a lesbian, had all her clothes stolen from her locker with no ramifications for the perpetrators. Sam indicated that her physical education teachers did not want to facilitate tough conversations about bullying, especially harassment targeted at LGBTQ students. Sam said they just wanted to “get their work done.” Although a physical educator’s role should encompass promoting a safe educational climate for all students, participants perceived that teachers would rather not contend with the often-difficult social circumstances facing some students. McCaughtry et al. (2005) advocated for physical educators to listen to students in pragmatic ways, attending to hurtful language in locker-room interactions—and to listen directly to LGBTQ students who express feelings of isolation and fear.

The lack of support demonstrated by physical educators took a toll on some participants. For example, Ryan discussed a type of numbing that takes place when you have been harassed for many years, making you less likely to turn to others for support. “There is a certain mindset if you have been bullied—about how you react to things—and it takes a lot to get to the point when you do report something.” While Ryan became “numb” as high school moved forward, Rory described how the toxicity and constant, unchecked harassment built up to an explosion of their own violence: “He just kept calling me a faggot or a sissy boy. Every single time he said it,

it just built up inside, and eventually it came to the point where . . . I ended up punching him in the gut.” They went on to describe how the teacher dismissed the incident without opening a dialogue about homophobic harassment and the toll that it takes on its targets. Rory perceived that if incidents were dealt with quickly, the teacher was satisfied and wanted to move on: “They didn’t really want to tell his parents that he got punched by a gay kid at school for being an asshole.”

Administrators

Overall, participants articulated a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness regarding the idea of turning to others for support, especially adults. Patrick suggested that because physical education teachers were unhelpful in combatting bullying, neither he nor others who were harassed felt empowered to reach out to school administrators for guidance: “What is the point? . . . I don’t know who to talk about with these things, because nobody else is really going through it.” Although a few participants posited that the “very, very socially conservative nature” (Frank) of their high school community, including the administrative personnel, were the reasons why they did not turn to these people for guidance, others were uncertain as to the reason. Regardless, participants were clear that these adults could not be counted on to help them contend with the often-relentless bullying they were facing in physical education.

Rory further echoed the notion that they did not often turn to administrators for help, saying, “It’s not that I wasn’t comfortable; it is that *they* weren’t comfortable.” In other words, Rory sensed that physical educators and school administrators did not know how to communicate with LGBTQ students about the issues they were facing in physical education classes. One participant, Joe, did acknowledge that he trusted one administrator at his high school, but emphasized, “Even though I felt comfortable, I would like to add that I didn’t expect anything to actually change. It was more like an opportunity to vent, have a conversation.”

Peers

While physical educators and administrators were not perceived to be a useful or empathetic support system for participants, perceptions of peer support were mixed. For example, Joe’s female friends

outed him to the football team against his wishes, leaving him without his only group of previously trusted peer allies. Physical education, a class that he had enjoyed, was no longer a safe space for him. Another participant, Frank, also perceived that he was abandoned by his close friends after coming out. Ryan described a lack of social support from peers, stating, “The first thing that bullies do when they start picking on you is isolation. That social isolation is almost worse than the bullying itself.” Rory echoed, “[Students] would all avoid me and leave me alone in a bubble.” Although their physical education peers were not helpful when they experienced bullying in class, Rory and Sam did have several good friends to lean on. Rory stated, “My friends were very comforting. . . . Most were also like, ‘They’re all assholes; forget them.’” Although encouraging one to forget bullying episodes was helpful for Rory, Patrick did not find solace in this dismissive approach. He described how friends would attempt to minimize verbal harassment by saying things such as, “Don’t worry about it; it’s just a gym class.” When asked if those words of encouragement helped, he indicated that at the time, they did not: “Those things hurt when you are in high school and at that age.” In a systematic review of the extent to which friendships attenuate the negative outcomes pertaining to peer victimization (e.g., anxiety, somatic complaints, and sleep problems), Schacter et al. (2021) reported inconsistent findings. They indicated that some investigations show strong evidence of friendships buffering the emotional and physical consequences of being targeted. Interestingly, others show no connection one way or the other—or that strong friendships may even exacerbate the stress associated with harassment.

Families

While friends were a source of comfort for some after experiencing harassment in physical education, family support was associated more with the protection of the participant’s physical safety; it was not explicitly an endorsement of their LGBTQ status. Although one’s physical well-being is important, Roe’s (2016) research highlighted that LGBTQ youth need *explicit* support from families to feel safe. Rory commented on their mother’s role: “[The support] wouldn’t be when I approached her saying, ‘Hey, mom, I am uncomfortable in my gym class.’ . . . It would be her saying, ‘Why are you crying’ or ‘Why do you have bruises and scrapes?’” Rory went on to describe

how it was more of a maternal instinct to protect her child rather than to worry about their emotional comfort in physical education. Like Rory, Joe's parents were supportive in a protective way; they did not want him to get hurt or killed for being gay. While Rory and Joe had parents who would at least seek to protect their physical safety, a few other participants either expressed discomfort at discussing parental support or articulated that while in high school, they were no longer allowed to live at home once they were "out." Unfortunately, outright family rejection can have dire consequences for LGBTQ youth, including significantly higher rates of suicide and drug use (Rosario et al., 2004).

Participant Empathy

Although descriptive memories related to high school physical education evoked emotional pain for participants, many expressed empathy for those involved in the bullying dynamic. For example, when speaking about the students who most often perpetrated harassment in physical education, Rory stated, "[Bullies] don't know what words to use, so [they] use abusive language. I don't think that those students even knew about themselves. . . . One day you'll grow up." Ryan stated, "I could not hate him. I could not be angry at him. I could only feel empathy toward him. . . . That makes it really hard if you are the victim of someone else's harassment and you can only feel sorry for them. . . . I could see that he had been hurt enough in the past, and that is where his reactions came from." Evidence suggests that empathy is a critical step toward forgiving those who have harmed you in some way (Davis & Gold, 2010). Research interventions that focus on the forgiveness of bullies have been shown to reduce anger (Watson et al., 2017).

Participants also did not blame their peers or friends who offered lackluster support for what they were experiencing in physical education. Rory said, "I don't think that was because they didn't want to do anything. I think it was because they were scared." After Frank came out, many of his friends, especially those he competed with athletically, no longer interacted with him socially: "They stopped hanging out with me." However, he could empathize, knowing that they did not want the type of social ostracism that he was experiencing from others: "I imagined they didn't want that to happen to them, and that is completely understandable from my point of view."

Although bullying in physical education was a reality for participants, they did not blame the teachers who made little effort to stop the harassment. Many were able to identify that physical education teachers simply lacked the appropriate tools to help. Rory offered, “They are just uncomfortable breaching [*sic*] the subject of emotional content.” Sam articulated, “[Bullying] was ignored, and I’m not trying to say that the teachers were mean people. I knew them, and they were good people. I just don’t think they had the skills or ideas of how to combat that. I don’t think that was part of what they were trained to do.” Frank echoed, “I don’t think the teachers themselves were homophobic. I think they just lacked any ability whatsoever to talk about those topics and no had idea. I think if they were forced to talk about it, they would be like a deer in headlights. They had received no training, had no ability, and they just had no idea, which is scary. . . . I still don’t talk to them, obviously, but I still think of them as decent human beings.” Although physical educators who enable homophobic bullying were possibly acculturated in similarly homophobic climates during their education, it is remarkable that the participants were able to express such an understanding of their limitations.

Future Impact

It is worthwhile to consider the social ecology of high school physical education and the potential lasting impact that one’s experiences can have on future physical activity. Prior research has shown a connection between negative experiences in secondary physical education and adult physical activity patterns (Strean, 2009; Cardinal et al., 2013). However, when asked if the harassment they experienced impacted their current physical activity, two of the participants reported that high school physical education had no impact, either positively or negatively, on their current physical activity habits. Patrick indicated that he still enjoys individual pursuits such as skiing. Sam also did not feel that high school physical education impacted her current activity levels at all as she still swims regularly.

While Patrick and Sam saw no connection between their experiences in high school physical education and their college activity levels, others could not seem to forget how scarring their previous experiences were. For example, Frank described how running used to be a part of his identity and that since he has been in college, he

has gained over fifty pounds. “Mentally, I always think about how my friends peaced out and how out of shape I am now and how that disconnect happened after I came out. But that is what always happens when I exercise: I think about being in cross-country and track and then how everyone stopped talking to me after I came out.” Joe echoed Frank’s feelings: “It actually took me another three years to get physically active again . . . three years actually to find the level of comfort that I had prior to that. I tried going to . . . the weight room, but then my initial reactions when I get into them was that these are not safe places anymore. Then it took me a long time to actually come back and feel comfortable again.” Rory said, “I don’t ever work out. . . . I don’t want to have that happen again. . . . Being made fun of makes it uncomfortable to approach a weight room or . . . run on the track because I run femininely, and someone is going to point that out because it’s a bad thing.” Since graduating high school, Ryan has avoided team sports due to their perceived toxicity and has sought out martial arts and individual pursuits like rock climbing as a way to not feel like a target anymore. “I am learning how to stand up for myself and protect myself. . . . I am in martial arts as a way to become more powerful, and I also do rock climbing to build muscle . . . to make myself more intimidating.” Ryan further offered a much-needed call to action for physical educators, indicating that they should develop “activities that everyone can participate in . . . [where] nobody feels threatened or overpowered.”

Conclusion

Research shows that LGBTQ students experience fewer instances of homophobic bullying when attending intentionally inclusive schools (Proulx et al., 2019). This article does not resolve how to make secondary institutions more welcoming in general, but it does call for solutions on how to make physical education specifically a welcome space for LGBTQ youth. One of the participants in this study, Patrick, articulated that during his time in high school, physical education was simply “a requirement to get out of the way.” Prior research has illuminated how queer people have not perceived physical education as beneficial, with some articulating disdain for the subject based on their traumatic experiences (McGlashan, 2013).

If LGBTQ students perceive that physical education is a hostile, unwelcoming climate, scholars and practitioners must consider ways in which various social entities can begin supporting these students.

Unfortunately, research to date points to more than a few isolated cases of physical educators failing to support and protect LGBTQ students. For example, evidence suggests that physical educators find the work of inclusivity to be too challenging (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021). Further, LGBTQ youth were *least likely* to identify a physical educator as someone they could talk to about the harassment they face at school. Additionally, only 5% of high school students indicated that they had ever seen a positive representation of an LGBTQ topic in physical education (Kosciw et al., 2020). Concerning teacher training, Coll (2019) argues that we must go beyond encouraging “tolerance” and cultivate PETE programs that disrupt norms (Devís-Devís et al., 2018). However, this might prove to be a difficult endeavor. When examining the attitudes of college students, O’Brien et al. (2013) found that students in PETE programs carried more prejudicial attitudes toward LGBTQ people than those training to teach and work within other content areas and disciplines (e.g., biology and psychology). Improving the culture of physical education is going to be a lengthy endeavor, but we can and must work within the social ecology of the gym to facilitate change. Asking undergraduate students to reflect on their subjective warrant and their personal biases, as well as more clearly dissecting the insular and heteronormative culture of physical education, could help in training a new and more sensitive generation of educators.

The results of this investigation will hopefully raise awareness of the unique social-ecological reality that LGBTQ students face within the physical education context. Scholars and practitioners must consider ways in which various social entities, such as peers, school personnel, and families, can begin protecting and supporting these students. Additionally, if it is found that physical education teachers are enabling homophobic bullying, specific pro-social educational interventions may be needed. It is hoped that LGBTQ students will report that physical education teachers, peers, school personnel, and families are working hard to support and protect them. If we find otherwise, significant steps will be necessary to ensure their future physical and emotional safety.

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WELLNESS

Fall 2020 Fully Online Semester and Maintaining Wellness in College Student Physical Education

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Abstract

With instructional formats changing due to COVID, it is essential to examine the effect of a physical activity (PA) and wellness course on college student wellness and motivation when courses had to be delivered fully online. This research examines the effect of an online PA and wellness course on wellness and motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre- and post-test surveys were utilized to measure changes in wellness and motivation among college students enrolled in a PA and wellness course. There were significant increases between the pre- and post-assessment scores for all dimensions of wellness and motivation. Including whole-person wellness and motivation content in college-level IPAP curriculum may enhance students' overall wellness and motivation for wellness-promoting behaviors even during an atypical semester.

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Introduction

College Student Wellness

Student wellness has become not only a domestic concern here in the US (Cardinal, 2015) but has also drawn international concern (Esteban-Gonzalo et al., 2020; Roffey, 2015; Rose et al., 2015). The concept of a holistic approach to college student wellness has recently gained traction in higher education despite a longstanding understanding of its importance (Cardinal, 2014). Hettler (1984) proposed a holistic approach to college student wellness, consisting of six dimensions of health-related behaviors: physical wellness, emotional wellness, spiritual wellness, social wellness, occupational wellness, and intellectual wellness.

Today, a holistic approach to wellness is associated with improved psychological functioning that serves as a protective mechanism against physical disorders in adolescent populations (Esteban-Gonzalo et al., 2020). Research in college student health and wellness has design limitations that threaten reliability and validity. Studies on college students and wellness either have used small sample sizes (Baldwin et al., 2017) or overlooked a pre-post-intervention design (Lothes & Nanney, 2019). Lothes and Nanney (2019) and Baldwin et al. (2017) found that wellness differences may vary from the types of colleges students attend to gender differences in ratings of wellness. Baldwin et al. (2017) found that students who reported being employed also reported higher ratings of self-efficacy than unemployed students. Baldwin et al. (2017) also found that female students reported engaging in less exercise and reported lower ratings of overall health-related behaviors than males. Lothes and Nanney (2019) conducted an end-of-semester assessment with college students ($n = 1544$) using the Wellness Inventory (Travis, 1981) and found few significant differences between the demographics of age and gender on the 12 dimensions of wellness. On the other hand, they discovered that students who self-reported higher overall levels of wellness and higher levels of exercise frequency had higher wellness scores than students who reported lower levels of both. A limitation of both Lothes and Nanney's (2019) and Baldwin et al.'s (2017) work was that they failed to conduct pre-post assessments to examine whether

wellness scores changed within the groups over the course of the semester.

Quinn et al. (2019) and Son et al. (2020) found through a series of qualitative interviews that students expressed concerns for information on matters of wellness, including issues of nutrition, economics, mental health, social interactions, the health of loved ones, and campus safety. Wilson et al. (2021) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, physical activity alone did not protect against deterioration in mental health. Due to recent concerns growing internationally, as well as from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for an instructional physical activity course to offer information on wellness beyond just engaging in physical activity. While these findings shed light on wellness differences between college students, they were taken in a single snapshot in time, overlooking how interventions could be designed for long-term activities and benefits.

With the continued trend of college students engaging in sedentary (Buckworth & Nigg, 2004) and unhealthy behavioral patterns, Cardinal (2014) asked researchers and colleges to engage in a call-to-action to study student well-being and examine how we can positively impact college student's health and well-being beyond teaching diet and exercise. Instructional physical activity courses need to design and implement effective ways to encourage students to engage in activities that promote not only physical health, but overall wellness as well. A student's time during college not only allows them to grow as emerging adults, but it also has the potential to lay the foundation for what healthy or unhealthy lifestyle habits will develop across their lifespan (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2010). Cardinal (2014) has suggested that researchers look at college students' well-being on a more holistic level.

COVID-19 and Well-being

Mental illness can affect students' motivation, concentration, and social interactions—crucial factors for students to succeed in higher education (Son et al. 2020). The presence of an epidemic—in the case of COVID-19, a pandemic—accentuates or creates new stressors, including fear and worry for oneself or loved ones, constraints on physical movement and social activities due to quarantine, and sudden and radical changes to lifestyle (Son et al. 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic continues to upend the lives of students in higher educa-

tion institutions (Soria & Horgos, 2021). In particular, the pandemic has had deleterious effects on students' mental health leading to an increased prevalence of major depressive disorder (MDD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) (Soria & Horgos, 2021). Per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey, 40.9% of 5,412 adults reported at least one adverse mental health condition in 2020 (White et al., 2021). This trend has also been documented globally (White et al., 2021). Results from Soria and Horgos (2021) show that, during the pandemic, 35% of students met the criteria for clinically significant MDD, and 39% met the criteria for GAD. Certain variables can affect the severity of the stressors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including demographics (gender, first generation, race/ethnicity, international, dependency, etc.), interpersonal (feeling valued), institutional (feeling supported by the university), health and safety, finances, and academics (Soria & Horgos, 2021). The current study was conducted during the fall 2020 semester when the COVID-19 pandemic caused all classes to be delivered online the entire semester at a southeastern university in the United States. In this study, participants' levels of wellness were measured at the beginning and end of the semester to investigate changes in wellness patterns during a global pandemic.

Distance Learning/Online Learning and Wellness

Due to COVID-19, distance learning/online learning has become more prominent than in the past. The COVID-19 pandemic also caused disruptions in students' wellness (Wilson et al., 2021). Wilson et al. (2021) compared a group of students during the COVID-19 pandemic with fully online courses to a group of students from the same university before the pandemic. They found significant declines in physical activity, an increase in perceived stress, and a significant increase in depressive symptoms among women in the pandemic group. According to Son et al. (2020), 71% of the participants indicated increased stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts during the COVID-19 shutdown. Some identified stressors as their health and loved ones' health, difficulty concentrating, disruptions to sleeping patterns, decreased social interaction, and increased concern for academic performance. Due to these findings, measures need to be taken to combat these problems.

Hager et al. (2012) assessed physical activity, diet, and fitness in a wellness course delivered face-to-face and online through a pre- and post-survey. The in-person course had greater improvements across measures, but both the face-to-face and online courses improved. Therefore, the course was valuable for promoting wellness regardless of delivery format. However, Everhart and Dimon (2013) assessed a face-to-face, fully online, and hybrid format and found that regardless of the delivery method, completing a wellness course improved the participants' nutrition habits and physical activity. Spittaels et al. (2006) reported that regular physical activity has an important influence on the health status and well-being of adults. A goal universities should include is to increase physical activity or increase the knowledge of how physical activity can help emerging adults, such as how to implement physical activity into the daily lives of the undergraduate population. Considering current trends with college students engaging in sedentary lifestyles both during their college years and after (Buckworth & Nigg, 2004), it is strongly encouraged that students are educated on matters of wellness and physical activity during this time.

Miller and Jensen (2020) introduced mindfulness activities into their online course delivery, to examine the effects and possibly decrease the levels of stress among students in the high-stress time of COVID-19. Miller and Jensen (2020) reported that they received positive feedback from students even if they did not attend every activity. A student shared qualitative data that they found the activities to be very beneficial because they relieved high levels of stress from their already difficult courses being changed to an online delivery format due to COVID-19. In the study by White et al. (2021), they administered a large online self-care intervention course open to any interested participant who was willing and able to pay the registration fee. They evaluated data after to determine the effectiveness of the course, and they found that through their online course ($N = 216$), they were able to provide support for the effectiveness of an online formatted self-care intervention (wellness) course. Significant improvements occurred over the semester in measures of nutrition, physical activity, mental health (depression and anxiety), perceived stress, and self-efficacy (one's perceived ability to overcome adversity).

Due to the online format, researchers believed adherence to course activities to improve wellness while taking online courses could be challenging. White et al. (2021) found that within their study, the adherence to the course and the participants' wellness goals met percentages were very high, even with the online format. The mean adherence was 76.3% of days for nutrition, 79.7% for physical activity, and 74.6% for mental wellness behaviors. In their study 88% met their nutrition goals, 89% met their physical activity goals, and 85% met their mental wellness goals. Although the percentages showed that they did not reach 100% adherence, data was not collected to determine the reason for non-adherence. According to Sideman et al. (2011), no matter the course delivery method, the motivation of the participants involved did not show any significant differences. This is promising evidence that no matter the method of delivery of these courses they can facilitate positive change to better students' wellness.

College Student Wellness

According to Travis (1981), people must engage in self-care activities to attain higher levels of wellness. Such activities may include being able to experience and express emotions effectively, eating a nutritious diet, participating in regular physical activity, constructively engaging the mind, being creative, and having some form of spiritual practice.

The American College Health Association (ACHA, 2021) identified physical inactivity as a continuing concern for the college population and has called for immediate attention to the matter. According to the National College Health Assessment (NCHA), delivered by ACHA, 39.7% of US college students ($N = 33,204$) met physical activity recommendations for aerobic and strength training activity. The NCHA also showed that 36.5% of US college students self-reported being overweight or obese.

When it comes to issues of mental health, the ACHA has also expressed concerns about increasing issues of college student mental health. The implications for these elevated numbers of mental health concerns in college students suggest that universities need to implement wellness teaching to help students learn effective, evidence-based skills that may help to reduce maladaptive behaviors and improve mental health. With increased rates of college mental

health service usage, even before the pandemic (Lipson et al., 2018), colleges and universities must employ strategies to help students develop skills for high-level wellness they can utilize immediately and sustainably to reduce the load on mental health services. Still, many students face challenges and hindrances to their wellness and may not seek or get the help they need (Keyes & Haidt, 2003). This is where wellness and physical activity courses for students could offer some helpful tools to move them toward the direction of wellness.

The goal of many physical activity and health educators is to equip and empower students to establish and implement healthy lifestyle choices so they can flourish or move toward high-level wellness. Health behavior patterns established during college years have been shown to have a strong relationship to adult patterns of health behaviors later in life (Hultquist et al., 2009). Rouse and Biddle (2009) claim that a better education or understanding of physical activity and wellness can help move people toward high-level wellness. During their college years, many students are learning for the first time how to balance work, school, relationships, free time, and self-care. Providing students with educational materials on wellness is vital at this stage of their development. Through practical quality education, students can learn about different effective and ineffective health habits for wellness and how to begin to establish healthy habits. Many factors play a role in college students' wellness (Downes, 2015); therefore, a multidimensional approach to wellness is essential (Chugani et al., 2020; Travis & Ryan, 2004).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were changes in students' wellness scores while taking a Physical Activity and Wellness (PED 101) course during the COVID-19 pandemic Fall 2020 semester at a southeastern university in the United States (IRB approval #18-0232). An examination of overall changes in the 12 dimensions of wellness scores, as well as self-reported motivation to make changes in those wellness dimensions, was conducted. Pre-post outcomes were assessed for overall scores of wellness and motivation and by gender, self-reported health status, and frequency of exercise. The hypotheses were:

- H_1 : All students who took PED 101 during the Fall 2020 COVID-19 pandemic semester would experience a signifi-

cant improvement in wellness scores from the start of the semester to the end of the semester.

- H_2 : All students who took PED 101 during the Fall 2020 COVID-19 pandemic semester would experience a significant improvement in motivation scores from the start of the semester to the end of the semester.
- H_3 : Students who took PED 101 during the Fall 2020 COVID-19 pandemic semester, divided by gender into a male group and a female group, would experience a significant improvement in all dimensions of wellness from the start of the semester to the end of the semester, regardless of gender.
- H_4 : Students who took PED 101 during the Fall 2020 COVID pandemic semester, divided by gender into a male and a female group, would experience a statistically significant improvement in motivation scores for all dimensions of wellness from the start of the semester to the end of the semester, regardless of gender.

Methods

Participants

The population for this study consisted of students enrolled in PED 101 who completed a lifetime physical activity and wellness curriculum during the Fall 2020 fully online COVID-19 semester as part of an Instructional Physical Activity Program (IPAP). For the sample, PED 101 students ($n = 1593$) were assessed at the beginning of the semester (August 2020) for each dimension of wellness and then again at the end of the semester (December 2020).

Demographics

Participating students were asked to provide demographic characteristics. Of the 1,593 students, 593 identified as male and 1,000 as female. Age was split into the Wellness Inventory's specified categories: 18-24 years of age = 1,379 students; 25-34 years of age = 135 students; and 35+ years of age = 56 students, and 45+ years of age = 23 students. The 1,593 students exercised at different frequencies (daily to monthly): daily = 131 students; 4-6x/week = 272 students; 3x/week = 361 students; 2x/week = 377 students; 1x/week = 288 students; and

1x/month = 164 students. Frequency of exercise was combined into three groups: daily and 4-6x/week (High = 402 students); 3x/week and 2x/week (Moderate = 738 students); and 1x/week and 1x/month (Low = 453 students). Students also self-reported their level of health status: Excellent = 357, Good = 922, Fair = 289, Poor = 25.

Course Description

During Fall 2020, the course was fully online. The academic content of the course was conducted online with resources available through Canvas and the Wellness Inventory for dimensions of wellness. An eBook with the physical activity curriculum was also used through Top Hat (Nanney, 2019) for students to work through tutorials online about physical activity and wellness. The course was two credit hours and included both a wellness lecture component and a physical activity lab. The physical activity lab normally is delivered face-to-face with instruction two times per week for 50 minutes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lab was offered fully online with asynchronous instruction equivalent to two days of 50 minutes of physical activity. The wellness lecture, normally delivered asynchronously online, included course content and assignments focused on increasing wellness awareness and developing wellness-promoting practices across John Travis's 12 dimensions of wellness (i.e., self-responsibility and love, moving, eating, feeling, and communicating). The course was designed to provide applicable information to a large diverse group of undergraduate students with a variety of knowledge and background in physical activity and wellness. The course was designed to be appropriate for all levels of students, from those who know very little about health and wellness to those who may have a strong grasp on concepts of health and wellness. Throughout the semester, students created action steps to help guide them on a path toward wellness through a process of implementing small steps for continuous improvement (Cardinal, 2014).

For the physical activity laboratory, students had the autonomy to enroll in the class physical activity they preferred from among approximately 50 different physical activity topics. Examples include Aikido, fencing, Pilates, yoga, group exercise, weight training, couch to 5K, dance for fitness, tennis, lifetime sports, cardio/strength/stretch, and many more. The laboratory consisted of readings that were conducted through a customized online book (Nanney, 2019),

applied learning-focused labs, and physical activity logs. Chapters and labs focused on topics such as aerobic fitness, muscular fitness, mobility and breath, the impact of physical activity on thinking and feeling, sustaining an active lifetime, and more. All the physical activity labs for this semester were delivered online. The instructor utilized different methods, such as real-time Zoom classes, activity logs, videos to follow along, and more, to help students engage in their selected physical activity class. Students also documented the completion of their activities in some form of log or journaling activity, and these counted as their attendance records for the semester.

Measures

Wellness Inventory

Completion of the Wellness Inventory was a required assignment at the beginning and end of the course. The Wellness Inventory was used to assess self-reported student wellness across the 12 dimensions of wellness. Results were visible to the students in a final, interactive report through the Wellness Inventory portal. The Wellness Inventory has evidence of reliability and validity in the assessment of college student populations (Travis & Ryan, 2004). The Wellness Inventory has also been used in previous studies with college-aged populations (Lothes & Kantor, 2021; Lothes, 2020; Lothes & Nanney, 2019) and during a natural disaster (Lothes et al., 2021).

The Wellness Inventory assessment includes 10 questions on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely) for each of the 12 dimensions of wellness (120 questions total). The questions ask about behavioral aspects of each wellness dimension with a total possible score ranging from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest) for each dimension. There is also a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest), to assess the respondent's motivation to change a particular aspect of wellness. Motivation scores range from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest). The wellness inventory includes no reverse-scored items. There are 12 dimensions of wellness in John Travis's Wellness Inventory (Travis & Ryan, 2004). See Lothes et al. (2021) for a more detailed description of the Wellness Inventory dimensions.

Statistical Analysis

The Wellness Inventory results were collected for all 12 dimensions of wellness for all the courses offered. To maintain the confidentiality of the students, no personal identifiers were used during data analysis. Paired *t*-tests were conducted on the scores for each of the dimensions of wellness from the Wellness Inventory (pre/post). Students also reported motivation for change on each of the 12 dimensions in the Wellness Inventory. Paired *t*-tests were conducted on pre/post motivation to change scores for each dimension of the Wellness Inventory. Paired *t*-tests were also conducted separately for males and females to assess if there were differences by gender.

Results

Overall Wellness Scores

Wellness assessment scores showed significant increases across each of the 12 dimensions of wellness from pre- to post. Similar trends were identified for motivation (Tables 1 & 2).

Gender

Both males (Appendix A & B) and females (Appendix C & D) showed significant increases in both wellness ratings and motivation for change per dimension from pre-assessment to post-assessment.

Discussion

These results support the hypothesis that wellness scores would increase from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester even amid a pandemic. The results also support the hypotheses that wellness scores and motivation would increase in both males and females. Along with the pandemic came increased rates of depression, anxiety, and substance misuse among college students (Charles et al., 2021). With the COVID-19 variants that surfaced over the course of the pandemic and the pandemic's consistent disruption to institutions, universities should establish contingency and continuity plans to mitigate academic disruptions in the short term and long term. These plans should consider not only current or potential pandemics but also other potential disruptions, such as natural disasters (Lothes et al., 2021). These contingency and continuity plans should include considerations for how to support whole-person wellness among

Table 1
Overall Wellness Pre/Post

Dimension (N = 1593)	Pre		Post		Pre-Post		p-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Pooled SD	Paired t		
Self-Respect & Love	73.89	13.32	80.70	13.25	13.285	21.40	<.0001***	0.513
Breathing	56.36	17.97	72.18	18.04	18.005	34.35	<.0001***	0.879
Sensing	66.93	14.87	76.54	14.99	14.930	27.75	<.0001***	0.644
Eating	55.32	18.78	67.03	18.89	18.835	27.98	<.0001***	0.622
Moving	57.56	20.95	72.25	19.49	38.573	31.07	<.0001***	0.381
Feeling	65.29	17.35	74.83	17.44	17.400	24.58	<.0001***	0.548
Thinking	62.35	17.39	73.08	17.90	17.647	27.03	<.0001***	0.608
Playing & Working	64.09	18.07	74.89	17.86	17.965	26.63	<.0001***	0.601
Communicating	76.24	14.27	81.55	14.15	14.210	17.48	<.0001***	0.374
Intimacy	77.02	16.36	82.13	15.50	15.936	15.26	<.0001***	0.321
Finding Meaning	67.93	17.77	76.36	17.28	17.527	22.43	<.0001***	0.481
Transcending	67.07	18.16	75.89	17.51	17.848	23.14	<.0001***	0.494

Note. *<.01; **<.001; ***<.0001.

Table 2
Overall Motivation Pre/Post

Dimension (N = 1593)	Pre		Post		Pre-Post		p-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Pooled SD	Paired t		
Self-Respect & Love	70.66	22.01	76.23	25.25	23.685	10.16	<.0001***	0.235
Breathing	69.15	23.87	75.90	25.51	24.704	11.83	<.0001***	0.273
Sensing	64.72	37.22	71.97	28.30	33.062	8.35	<.0001***	0.219
Eating	71.55	23.44	76.39	25.09	24.279	8.94	<.0001***	0.199
Moving	71.15	24.76	76.09	26.67	25.732	8.52	<.0001***	0.191
Feeling	70.87	26.43	75.77	28.05	27.252	8.57	<.0001***	0.180
Thinking	73.89	35.68	76.96	26.54	31.444	3.57	<.001**	0.098
Playing & Working	72.11	26.15	76.26	27.60	26.885	7.22	<.0001***	0.154
Communicating	71.17	29.20	75.92	29.44	29.320	7.76	<.0001***	0.162
Intimacy	69.82	30.96	74.83	31.14	31.050	7.85	<.0001***	0.161
Finding Meaning	73.42	26.29	76.84	27.93	27.122	5.89	<.0001***	0.126
Transcending	66.53	28.28	72.90	29.32	28.805	10.55	<.0001***	0.221

*<.01, **<.001, ***<.0001

students during disruptions, not just logistics like course delivery format changes. This study's results provide promising outcomes that universities offering a physical activity and wellness course can help build and maintain wellness even when disruptions to traditional course schedules occur.

Summary of Findings

The implications of using the Wellness Inventory as an assessment tool for college students are promising. Regardless of the pandemic, natural disaster (Lothes et al., 2021), or during a “normal” semester (Lothes & Kantor, 2021), the results of this study offer evidence that a course designed for implementing the 12 dimensions of wellness shows promise for moving students in the direction of high-level wellness. Even during the challenges posed by a pandemic, college students showed significant increases in all 12 dimensions of wellness. Both male and female students showed significant increases in wellness ratings from the start to the end of the semester. These outcomes show promise that a physical activity and wellness course that incorporates teaching and application of whole-person wellness practices can be designed to help move students in the direction of high-level wellness (2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2018; Cardinal, 2014).

Cardinal et al. (2015) have advocated for more well-rounded approaches to teaching and assessing wellness in college students. One possible reason behind the successful increase in wellness scores was that the wellness curriculum was delivered through online (Canvas and Top Hat) tutorials that students accessed each week with homework assignments that engaged students in different dimensions of wellness each week.

Copeland et al. (2021) found that students enrolled in the University of Vermont's Wellness Environment program reported that they were less affected by COVID-19 in terms of their internalization of symptoms and attention problems than those who were not enrolled in the Wellness Environment program on campus. Marr and Wilcox (2015) found that self-efficacy and social support facilitated the relationship between health locus of control, physical activity behaviors, and healthy eating habits. A course that offers a battery of options for learning about wellness aspects and describes

how to improve upon the dimensions of wellness can help increase college students' self-efficacy in moving toward high-level wellness.

As Cardinal (2017) has stated, "Quality physical education classes and programs that promote active, healthy living and that allow people to have profoundly meaningful physical activity experiences are something that we need more of" (p. 4). Cardinal (2014) has also recommended that we assess student wellness and education beyond health-based outcomes like exercise and weight. The findings of this study support the Travis and Ryan (2004) theory that wellness is more fluid than static. The current findings also build upon more contemporary research (Lothes, 2020; Lothes & Kantor, 2021; Lothes et al., 2021) by examining pre- and post-assessments as opposed to a single snapshot in time (Lothes & Nanney, 2019). These results show that students involved in a physical activity course within an Instructional Physical Activity Program that takes a holistic approach to wellness can help students improve on multiple dimensions of wellness even during a pandemic. Future research wanting to examine current pandemic effects could examine semesters across the pandemic (Spring 2019, Fall 2019, Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Fall 2021) to see if there are differences between scores of wellness at different stages of the pandemic. Future research should assess if wellness scores baseline after people are habituated to the effects of the pandemic.

As health educators, we can equip students to recognize where they are on their wellness journey and equip them to move forward toward high-level wellness (Travis, 1981; Travis & Ryan, 2004). Through educating on the matters of the 12 Dimensions of Wellness, educators can facilitate students' development of their wellness journey and maintain it even after graduation.

While this PED 101 course was not specifically designed to address the concerns of a pandemic disruption other than an extra credit, custom-created chapter on COVID-19 and wellness, the results do show that wellness enhancement can still be encouraged during these times. Specific content in the course lectures covered such topics as taking media breaks, engaging in self-care, mindfulness and meditation, exercise and nutrition, connecting with others, and finding time to unwind and engage in meaningful and joyful ac-

tivities. The content that focused on self-care and wellness consisted of a variety of approaches that students could implement.

Outcomes from this study show that even during times of a pandemic, a positive impact on student health and well-being can be addressed and affected despite the unconventional semester, thus helping maintain a healthy academic community for students.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that there was no control group or randomization to see if observed differences were the result of the course or were just a natural occurrence of being in college. It is recommended that future studies adopt an experimental or quasi-experimental approach by including a control group that is not exposed to the course. It is also recommended to capture student wellness before the course and follow them for longitudinal data collection after taking the course. Ideally, data collection should start during the semester before they take the course and continue through the semester that students take the course. Researchers could also consider tracking students longitudinally after the course to see if trends were sustained for the remainder of their college years. Randomization is not an option in this as students self-select when they will take their courses in college. However, the limitations of lacking randomization do not reduce the merit that changes are occurring from the start of the semester to the end of the semester.

Factors such as exposure to pandemic levels were not assessed and this study was only done at one university in the southeastern United States. These results may have looked different in more densely populated areas or regions of the country with prolific COVID-19 outbreaks. Research on natural disasters has found that during a disaster, an individual's degree of exposure to the disaster is highly predictive of their susceptibility to subsequent mental health issues (Fernandez et al., 2015; Goldman & Galea, 2014). The large sample size helps to offset any outliers in the data that may skew the data.

Another suggestion would be to try this same type of educational protocol with individuals in the public on a voluntary basis to see if measures of the wellness dimensions change in the absence of tight deadlines and the need to earn credit. Due to the nature of an academic course, participants may have been motivated to engage in wellness activities to earn credit for homework assignments.

Conclusion

Health educators are ideally placed to promote a holistic approach to well-being regardless of external events such as a pandemic (Cardinal et al., 2018). Since we cannot control what is going on globally, we can help to facilitate wellness for students in what they can control—their wellness journey.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report. The authors confirm that the research presented in this article met the ethical guidelines, including adherence to the legal requirements, of the United States, and received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of North Carolina Wilmington (18-0232).

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Appendix A

Males' Wellness Pre/Post

Dimension (n = 593)	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	Paired t	p-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Pooled SD			
Self-Respect & Love	73.90	13.57	79.17	14.01	13.792	10.04	<.0001***	0.382
Breathing	57.86	17.63	70.84	17.97	17.801	18.91	<.0001***	0.729
Sensing	67.25	14.50	75.20	14.63	14.565	15.17	<.0001***	0.546
Eating	55.75	18.10	66.37	17.81	17.956	17.04	<.0001***	0.591
Moving	60.88	19.69	72.30	18.53	19.119	16.95	<.0001***	0.597
Feeling	65.81	16.82	73.55	17.03	16.925	12.93	<.0001***	0.457
Thinking	64.27	17.20	72.45	17.04	17.120	13.55	<.0001***	0.478
Playing & Working	65.94	17.22	74.33	16.95	17.085	13.65	<.0001***	0.491
Communicating	74.71	14.85	79.08	14.54	14.696	8.89	<.0001***	0.297
Intimacy	75.86	16.08	79.86	15.09	15.593	6.96	<.0001***	0.257
Finding Meaning	68.41	17.69	74.61	16.84	17.270	10.95	<.0001***	0.359
Transcending	66.10	18.01	73.43	17.36	17.688	11.83	<.0001***	0.414

*<.01, **<.001, ***<.0001

Appendix B

Males' Motivations Pre/Post

Dimension (n = 593)	Pre		Post		Pre-Post	Paired t	p-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Pooled SD			
Self-Respect & Love	67.17	21.79	71.94	25.49	23.712	5.44	<.0001***	0.201
Breathing	63.40	24.23	71.01	25.67	24.960	8.17	<.0001***	0.305
Sensing	61.66	49.79	67.81	26.96	40.037	3.15	<.002*	0.154
Eating	66.83	23.86	71.95	24.85	24.360	5.73	<.0001***	0.210
Moving	65.82	25.46	71.38	26.93	26.205	5.65	<.0001***	0.212
Feeling	62.21	26.83	71.00	28.14	27.493	6.10	<.0001***	0.320
Thinking	69.91	49.14	72.50	26.10	39.344	1.31	.19	0.066
Playing & Working	66.29	26.51	71.70	27.54	27.030	7.22	<.0001***	0.200
Communicating	66.08	28.45	72.08	28.37	28.410	6.00	<.0001***	0.211
Intimacy	65.51	30.43	70.76	30.27	30.350	5.18	<.004*	0.173
Finding Meaning	68.52	26.52	72.73	27.38	26.953	4.45	<.008*	0.156
Transcending	61.76	27.75	68.51	28.32	28.036	7.26	<.0001***	0.241

*<.01, **<.001, ***<.0001

Appendix C

Females' Wellness Pre/Post

Dimension (n =1000)	Pre		Post		Pre- Post	Paired t	P-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Pooled SD			
Self-Respect & Love	73.87	13.17	81.60	12.70	12.93	19.42	<.0001***	0.598
Breathing	55.43	18.12	72.94	18.04	18.080	28.96	<.0001***	0.968
Sensing	66.76	15.04	77.34	15.14	15.090	23.38	<.0001***	0.701
Eating	55.05	19.18	67.43	19.51	19.346	22.30	<.0001***	0.640
Moving	55.49	21.49	72.22	20.06	20.787	26.38	<.0001***	0.805
Feeling	64.94	17.64	75.54	17.62	17.630	21.07	<.0001***	0.601
Thinking	61.22	17.41	73.46	18.38	17.901	23.75	<.0001***	0.684
Playing & Working	62.90	18.57	75.22	18.39	18.480	23.14	<.0001***	0.667
Communicating	77.13	14.00	82.99	13.72	13.861	15.22	<.0001***	0.423
Intimacy	77.61	16.70	83.46	15.63	16.174	14.06	<.0001***	0.362
Finding Meaning	67.56	17.93	77.36	17.45	17.692	19.86	<.0001***	0.554
Transcending	67.60	18.24	77.44	17.46	17.854	20.14	<.0001***	0.551

*<.01, **<.001, ***<.0001

Appendix D

Females' Motivations Pre/Post

Dimension (n =1000)	Pre		Post		Pre- Post	Paired t	P-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Pooled SD			
Self-Respect & Love	72.72	21.89	78.80	24.74	23.359	8.61	<.0001***	0.260
Breathing	72.52	23.07	78.81	24.96	24.034	8.65	<.0001***	0.262
Sensing	66.55	26.99	74.44	28.77	27.894	10.45	<.0001***	0.283
Eating	74.27	22.86	79.03	24.85	23.876	6.87	<.0001***	0.199
Moving	74.27	23.83	78.87	26.12	25.001	6.39	<.0001***	0.184
Feeling	74.22	25.64	78.61	27.59	26.633	6.11	<.0001***	0.165
Thinking	76.22	24.16	79.56	26.49	25.352	4.76	<.0001***	0.132
Playing & Working	75.56	25.32	78.96	27.30	26.329	4.69	<.0001***	0.129
Communicating	74.14	29.29	78.16	29.88	29.586	5.18	<.0001***	0.136
Intimacy	73.38	30.99	77.26	31.40	31.200	5.93	<.0001***	0.124
Finding Meaning	76.31	25.74	79.32	27.90	26.842	4.02	<.0001***	0.112
Transcending	69.36	28.22	75.54	29.56	28.898	7.80	<.0001***	0.214

*<.01, **<.001, ***<.0001

YOU AND THE LAW

Principles of Liability and Managing Sport-Related Concussions: Defenses against Negligence and Poor Concussion Risk Management

Thomas H. Sawyer, Ed.D. and Tonya L. Sawyer, Ph.D.

Introduction

When it comes to managing sport-related concussions, athletic personnel must adhere to key principles of liability. These principles are aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of athletes while minimizing the risk of liability. Keep in mind boys tend to be more aggressive and are far stronger than girls, so it is important to understand placing a male with females on contact (impact) sports teams could end in tragedy for a girl. The National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) (<https://www.nfhs.org>) in conjunction with the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) (<https://www.nata.org>) and the American College of Sports Medicine (<https://www.acsm.org>) has developed concussion courses for coaches and athletic administrators that many state high associations now require before a coach and athletic trainer can be certified to coach and work as an athletic trainer.

The NFHS, NATA, ACSM, and all 50 state high schools organizational bodies for interscholastic bodies suggest should be considered when drafting policies and procedures for the evaluation, treatment, and return to play after a concussion has taken place:

- **Stay Informed:** Athletic administrators, coaches, and athletic trainers should stay up-to-date with the latest research, guidelines, and best practices related to concussion management. This includes being aware of changes in concussion protocols and advancements in diagnostic tools to diagnose brain injuries. Your responsibility is not delegable, so remember that.
- **Education and Training:** As noted above, athletic personnel should receive proper education and training in concussion recognition, evaluation, and management. They should be knowledgeable about the signs and symptoms of concussion and the appropriate steps to take in case of a suspected concussion.
- **Implement Safety Policies:** Athletic trainers should work closely with school or organization administrators to establish and enforce safety policies and procedures related to concussions. This may include guidelines for return-to-play protocols, athlete education, and equipment safety.
- **Pre-participation Evaluations:** Consider utilizing thorough pre-participation evaluations can help identify any pre-existing conditions or risk factors that may increase the likelihood of concussions. Athletic directors and trainers should ensure that athletes are medically cleared before participating in sports activities.
- **Proper Documentation:** Accurate and detailed documentation is crucial in liability management. Athletic directors must make sure trainers maintain records of pre-participation evaluations, injury assessments, return-to-play protocols, and any communication with athletes, parents, or healthcare professionals.
- **Communication:** Effective communication with athletes, parents, coaches, and healthcare professionals is essential. Trainers should promptly report any suspected concussions, provide clear instructions for follow-up care, and keep all relevant parties informed throughout the recovery process.
- **Emergency Action Plan:** Athletic trainers should develop and regularly review an emergency action plan that outlines

the appropriate response in case of a suspected concussion or other medical emergencies. This plan should include contact information for emergency medical services and procedures for accessing necessary medical care.

- **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:** Trainers should continually assess and improve their concussion management practices based on feedback, research findings, and advancements in the field. Staying proactive and adaptable is key to providing the best care for athletes.

Whenever there is a concussion during practice or a game, the athletic director, trainer, and coach must be ready for a possible liability action. Of all injuries that happen in sports that generate law suits it is a concussion – so be ready. When facing a negligence claim related to sports injuries, several defenses and risk management strategies can be utilized. These defenses may include, but not limited to:

- **Assumption of risk:** This defense asserts that the injured party willingly participated in the sport or activity, understanding and accepting the inherent risks involved. To establish this defense, it must be shown that the plaintiff had knowledge of the risks and voluntarily chose to engage in the activity despite those risks.
- **Waivers and releases:** Properly drafted and executed waivers or release forms can help protect against liability by obtaining the participant's agreement to assume the risks and waive their right to sue for injuries arising from ordinary negligence. However, it is important to note that waivers may not protect against gross negligence or intentional misconduct claims.
- **Comparative negligence:** In some jurisdictions, the defense of comparative negligence may apply. This means that if the injured party is found to have contributed to their own injuries through their own negligence or failure to exercise reasonable care, their recovery of damages may be reduced in proportion to their level of fault.
- **Statute of limitations:** Each jurisdiction has a specific time limit within which a lawsuit must be filed. If the injured party

fails to initiate legal action within this timeframe, their claim against athletic trainers and government agencies may be barred by the applicable statute of limitations.

- **Proper supervision and coaching:** Employing qualified and experienced coaches and providing proper supervision during sports activities can demonstrate that reasonable care was exercised in preventing injuries. Adequate training, certification, and adherence to industry standards can bolster this defense.
- **Emergency response and medical care:** Ensuring that appropriate emergency response protocols are in place, including having qualified medical personnel available and providing prompt and proper medical care following an injury, can support the defense that reasonable and timely actions were taken to address the situation.
- **Compliance with regulations and safety standards:** Demonstrating compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and safety standards specific to sports and athletics can help establish a strong defense against negligence claims.

Finally, it is important to consult with legal counsel familiar with sports injury cases to assess the specific circumstances and jurisdictional laws applicable to your situation. They can provide tailored guidance on the defenses and risk management strategies most relevant to your case. In particular, head injuries are a big deal, and they can end people's careers before they start.

Instructions for Authors *The Physical Educator*

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