

Spring 2020

## Experiences in Physical Education and Sport: The Intersection of Identifying as a Female, an Athlete, and Visually Impaired

Margaret Buckley  
*Old Dominion University*, mbuck011@odu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/hms\\_etds](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/hms_etds)



Part of the [Health and Physical Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Buckley, Margaret. "Experiences in Physical Education and Sport: The Intersection of Identifying as a Female, an Athlete, and Visually Impaired" (2020). Master of Science in Education (MSEd), Thesis, Human Movement Sciences, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/a3hg-0r07  
[https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/hms\\_etds/48](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/hms_etds/48)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Human Movement Sciences at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Movement Sciences Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@odu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@odu.edu).

EXPERIENCES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT: THE INTERSECTION OF  
IDENTIFYING AS A FEMALE, AN ATHLETE, AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

by

Margaret Buckley  
B.S. May 2017, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

EDUCATION

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
May 2020

Approved by:

Justin A. Haegele (Director)

Xihe Zhu (Member)

Jonna L. Bobzien (Member)

ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT: THE INTERSECTION OF  
IDENTIFYING AS A FEMALE, AN ATHLETE, AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Maggi Buckley  
Old Dominion University, 2020  
Director: Dr. Justin A. Haegele

**Abstract**

**Introduction.** Individuals with visual impairments, females, and athletes encounter different challenges during physical education. However, little is known about how the challenges connected with each of these identities intersect and if that intersection impacts experiences differently. The purpose of this study was to take an explicitly intersectional approach to understand how identifying as an individual with a visual impairment, a female, and an athlete intersect to influence physical education and sport experiences. **Methods.** To describe the participants' intersectional experiences as female athletes with a visual impairment, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach was implemented. Four female athletes with visual impairments aged 23-28-years old, participated in this study. The study utilized two sources of data: semi-structured, audio-taped, telephone/video call interviews and reflective interview notes. Data were analyzed thematically using a three-step process guided by IPA. **Results.** From the data collected and analyzed, two connected, major themes were constructed (a) Physical education was 'just a credit' and (b) 'If you enjoy this, we will drive you'. **Discussion.** The results of this study aligned with prior research (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele & Zhu, 2017), by demonstrating the participants did not have meaningful physical education experiences. Interestingly, however, the participants noted that these poor experiences were not

critical to them, as they had developed a sense of athletic identity in other, outside of school physical activity opportunities supported by family.

Copyright, 2020, by Maggi Buckley All Rights Reserved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
BACKGROUND .....	1
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	4
DEFINITIONS.....	4
LIMITATIONS.....	5
DELIMITATIONS .....	5
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	5
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
DISABILITY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION .....	7
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT EXPERIENCES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION.....	9
ATHLETES WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION.....	12
GENDER AND VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION.....	14
INTERSECTIONALITY .....	19
SUMMARY .....	20
III. METHODOLOGY .....	22
RESEARCH APPROACH .....	22
PARTICIPANTS .....	22
DATA COLLECTION .....	25
DATA ANALYSIS.....	26
TRUSTWORTHINESS .....	27
IV. MANUSCRIPT .....	28
ABSTRACT.....	29
INTRODUCTION .....	30
METHODS .....	33
RESEARCH APPROACH .....	33
PARTICIPANTS .....	34
DATA COLLECTION .....	36
DATA ANALYSIS AND TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	37
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	38
PHYSICAL EDUCATION WAS ‘JUST A CREDIT’ .....	39
‘IF YOU ENJOY THIS, WE WILL DRIVE YOU’ .....	42
LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION .....	44
REFERENCES .....	47
V. SUMMARY .....	51
LIMITATIONS.....	53
CONCLUSION.....	53
REFERENCES .....	55

APPENDICIES .....	60
A. ....	60
B. ....	65
VITAE.....	66

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

In the recent years, research attention has shifted from parents' perspectives to investigate the perspective of those with disabilities about their personal experiences in physical education (Byrnes & Rickards, 2011). This area of study has provided those with disabilities a voice to express their thoughts, feelings, and frustrations about their personal experiences in physical education classes (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkins, 2010). This type of research has uncovered both positive and negative experiences that individuals with disabilities have encountered during daily physical education (Fitzgerald, 2005). Positive experiences, such as active participation supported by teacher accommodations and supportive teacher-student relationships, can influence the student's opinion and attitude towards physical education and may help build upon peer relationships in other classes (Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015; Haegele, Zhu & Davis, 2017). Unfortunately, negative experiences, such as bullying, social isolation, and different methods of judgement, are more commonly reported, and can have an impact on the attitudes of students with disabilities toward physical education and lead to self-selected exclusion and isolation from future activities (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015) ultimately leading to poor health (Warburton, Nicol & Bredin, 2006).

Understanding lived experiences in physical education for individuals with disabilities can contribute to our understanding of why those with disabilities tend to be less active than their peers (Haegele & Porretta, 2015). An absence of physical activity in an individual's life can lead to severe health risks, chronic diseases, and premature death (Warburton et al., 2006). Warburton and colleagues (2006) also expressed the importance of physical activity; specifically, how it is known to prevent health problems later in life and is significant to maintaining a healthy



lifestyle. The negative environment that those with disabilities often face while in physical education, and subsequent self-selected exclusion from activities, may cause long term issues effecting their overall health. Investigating the thoughts, feeling, frustrations, and experiences in physical education of people with disabilities can help teachers and other personnel understand how they experience instructions, activities, and peer interactions (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015).

The type of disability that one has may impact their experiences in physical education, and one such group of interest is those with visual impairments. Examining the existing literature on the views/perspectives of those with a visual impairment in physical education exposes a number of barriers to participation, along with the feelings, thoughts, and frustrations, they experience. In physical education, students with visual impairments tend to experience fear and frustration, are demeaned and discriminated against, and may feel worthless in the eyes of physical education teachers (Haegele & Zhu, 2017). For example, according to Haegele and colleagues (2017), individuals with visual impairment reflected that they believed their teachers viewed them as *flawed*, which informed other negative effects on the individual's physical education experience. The feelings of being *worthless*, *flawed* or *incapable* can steer individuals with visual impairments to self-selected exclusion and avoidance of physical education activities.

While research has examined the experiences of those with visual impairments, little attention has been paid to understanding how other identities influence physical education among those with visual impairments. Identities are aspects of who we are, which locate us in the social world, and thoroughly affect everything we do, say, and feel in our lives. For example, from an early age, children have a clear concept of what is expected of their gender and how to behave based on how society portrays *male* and *female* (Kirk, 2003). In a physical education setting, it is assumed that the males in the class are the *top-dog* participants with a competitive culture to

showcase their masculinity (Brown & Evans, 2004). Physical education teachers have certain opinions and expectations of what both males and females are capable of doing in physical education. Males are expected to be competitive, strong, tough, aggressive, and passionate players in physical education, where females are not; females are expected to nurture their emotions, be supportive, and care for their appearance (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992). The participation rate for females in physical education has been of major concern for many years (Daley & Buchanan, 1999). The lack of participation from females appears to be influenced by societal stereotypes and expectations learned, observed, and forced upon women which expects them to act a certain way (Constantinou, Manson & Silverman, 2009).

A conflicting identity, which has starkly different expectations in physical education than *traditional* females, are female athletes. A strong athletic identity can have both positive and negative outcomes and can create a feeling of empowerment (Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002). Female athletes in physical education settings tend to be motivated, competitive, and confident in their abilities and skills (Marsh et al., 1997). A high-intensity sport requires athletes to have advanced muscular strength, speed, agility, and power, along with developed technical skills and decision-making abilities (Gabbett, Jenkins, & Abernethy, 2009). Because these skills are present in athletes, when they are placed into a physical education setting, they tend to have higher skill abilities than their peers (Gabbett et al., 2009). Thus, female athletes tend to experience a conflicting role in physical education, where one's identity as a female and one's identity as an athlete may combat each other to inform behavior.

It is understood that individuals with visual impairments, females, and athletes encounter different challenges during physical education. However, little is known about how the challenges connected with each of these identities intersect and if that intersect impact

experiences differently. Intersectionality provides a conceptual framework to explore the intersections between identities and how they influence physical education experiences. In the 1970's and 1980's, intersectionality was developed by Black feminists challenging White feminists to think about how the oppression that comes with being a woman could be compounded by the oppressive experiences with being African American (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Intersectionality was later broadened to embrace the idea that all identities and experiences are intersectional (Cuthbert, 2017). Besides viewing individual's traits (i.e., gender, race, disability) as isolated traits, intersectionality views the intersections between them and how these traits shape experiences (Cuthbert, 2017). Intersectionality therefore was considered to provide conceptual framework approach to explore and understand an individual's multiple identities and how they combine to form experiences in specific contexts (Moodley & Graham, 2015). Thus, the purpose of this study was to take an explicitly intersectional approach to understand how identifying as an individual with a visual impairment, a female, and an athlete intersect to influence physical education and sport experiences.

### **Research Question**

- In what ways, does identifying as a person with a visual impairment, a female, and an athlete intersect to influence individuals reflected experiences about physical education and sport?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Elite Athlete.* An individual who has or currently is competing at a professional, national, or international level. (Team or Individual)

*Female.* The female gender is defined by the socially constructed roles and behaviors that a society typically associates with females.

*Identity.* Identities are aspects of who we are, which locate us in the social world, and thoroughly affect everything we do, say, and feel in our lives.

*Intersectionality.* A conceptual framework approach to explore and understand an individual's multiple identities and how they interact and combine to form experiences in specific settings (Moodley & Graham, 2015).

*Physical Education.* A school-based class that focuses on the development of physical fitness, motor skills and patterns, along with skills in aquatics, dance, individual sports, and team sports for adolescence and teens. Commonly known as P.E.

*Visual Impairment.* Encompasses those who are completely blind or have low vision.

#### **Limitations:**

- The retrospective nature of the study may limit the participant's ability to recall sufficient memories to respond to each question.
- Utilizing phone interviews may dilute the intimacy of the interview along with the ability of the interviewer to observe body language or facial expressions

#### **Delimitations:**

- The participants were female, elite athletes with a visual impairment who reflected on their P.E and sport experiences throughout K-12. Thus, results would not be generalizable to other groups of individuals.
- The interviewer followed an interview guide of questions created prior to the interviews.
- All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, allowing the interviewer to be flexible by adding in questions or expanding on other questions to gain as much information as possible.

#### **Significance of study:**

This study provided an understanding of the obstacle's female athletes with a visual impairment faced during their personal experiences in physical education and sport. It is understood that individual, females and those with disabilities experience hardships in a physical activity setting. However, little information is known about the obstacle's athletes with a disability (e.g. visual impairment) face and how those obstacles intersect with challenges related to gender (e.g. identifying as a female) in a physical education setting. The results of this study may be utilized to implement appropriate strategies into the physical education setting that foster an inclusive environment for students with visual impairments. Additionally, teachers may recognize the importance of potential lesson adaptations to strengthen the student-teacher relationship and ensure that all students, regardless of disability, are included and feel valued. Physical activity is a major component of living a healthy life and should be a positive experience for all individuals.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to provide a thorough review of the literature associated with the topics covered in this study. There are several topics that require investigation to fully comprehend their relation to identifying as a female athlete with a visual impairment in physical education. The first topic examined individuals with disabilities in physical education. The second topic targeted examination of different studies regarding the experiences of individuals with visual impairments in physical education. The third topic investigated athletes with visual impairments in physical education and sport. Fourth, literature on genders and visual impairments in physical education was examined. And the final topic of interest reviewed in support of the current study was intersectionality. Examining the literature in all areas supported the comprehensive understanding of each topic to foster the development of a well-supported study.

### **Disability in Physical Education**

In recent years, research has shifted focus to examine the perspective of students with disabilities in physical education. While research in this area is historically sparse, a recent trend toward examining the viewpoints of those with disabilities toward physical education has emerged. One of the first and most influential studies in this area of inquiry was conducted by Fitzgerald (2005), who examined the viewpoints of five students with various disabilities and their embodied experiences in physical education and school sports. This qualitative research study examined experiences the students faced in a context where they were labeled as *unable*. In this study, participants reported that their physical education teachers lacked any desire or concern of progression in class (Fitzgerald, 2005). Additionally, they stated that their peers and teachers influenced their impressions of activities as being accepted or rejected during physical

education. For example, one of the participants recalled that “...not everyone at school plays and not everyone does it in PE. It’s just not around like football or basketball or tennis, you know them popular sports.” (Fitzgerald, 2005, p.48). Although Fitzgerald pointed out that the students’ health and well-being should be the main priority of physical education, many of the participants recalled negative and challenging experiences in these contexts.

Recently, a qualitative inquiry review conducted by Haegele and Sutherland (2015) investigated the existing literature base focused on students with disabilities and their perspectives towards physical education. In this review, 13 articles were identified, and three thematic clusters emerged regarding the viewpoints of student with disabilities towards experiences in physical education (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). The three themes were (a) perspectives towards typically developing peers, (b) perspectives towards physical education teachers, and (c) perspectives towards inclusion and exclusion (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Interactions with typically developing peers were the most commonly explored perspective of students with disabilities (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Both positive and negative interactions between typically developing peers and students with disabilities were experienced. Positive experiences such as, providing support, caring, and consensual help led to building friendships between students with disabilities and typically developing peers (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). However, participants recalled negative experiences such as bullying, name calling, and laughing, leading to self-isolation and social isolation. According to Haegele and Sutherland (2015), positive attitudes from physical education teachers may be an important feature in creating a meaningful learning environment and experiences for students with disabilities. Although small modification and accommodations during physical education class could help create a welcoming environment (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). However, they were rather

uncommon. Inclusion and exclusion in physical education took the form of forced exclusion, self-exclusion and forced inclusion in the extant literature (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Forced exclusion occurred when activities had limits in the environment that inherently excluded the participants, self-exclusion was where students themselves decided to reject participation, and forced inclusion was when students with disabilities felt participation in activity was required but did not include support, and therefore often led to failure (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015).

Fitzgerald (2005) and Haegele and Sutherland (2015) presented similar results; for example, physical education teacher's attitudes and actions seemed to play a major role in contributing to students with disabilities' perspective toward physical education. Whether the perspectives were positive or negative, physical education teachers influenced the student's experience. Peer relationships and interactions were also both key themes discussed in Fitzgerald (2005) and Haegele and Sutherland (2015) as influencing the participants view on physical education. Each student had their own unique perspectives and opinions regarding physical education, sport, physical education teachers, and coaches.

### **Visual Impairment Experiences in Physical Education**

Individuals with visual impairments may represent one particular group of interest when examining physical education experiences. Research identified that upwards to 80% of children with visual impairments failed to reach critical levels of health-related fitness (Lieberman & McHugh, 2001). In addition, Kozub and Oh (2004) discussed how youth with visual impairments tended to be less physically active than their sighted peers, attributing to lower fitness levels, as well as, higher risk for health-related illnesses during childhood and into adulthood. The most probable environment for youth with visual impairments to learn about and engage in physical activity is school-based physical education programs (Haegele & Porretta, 2015).



With the implementation of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2014), specifically designed physical education that meets the needs of individual students, such as those with visual impairments, must be available. A well-planned and implemented physical education program can offer opportunities for students with visual impairments to participate in physical activity and experience peer interaction (Haegele & Porretta, 2015). However, due to poor training of physical education teachers (Lieberman & Conroy, 2013), youth with visual impairments may not obtain the proper instruction required to gain the necessary motor skills, abilities, and social interaction in order to live a healthy, active life. Poor training for physical education teachers can hinder the involvement of students with visual impairments in physical education class activities (Lieberman & Conroy, 2013), leading to self-selected isolation (Haegele & Zhu, 2017). The importance of the relationship between students with visual impairments and their physical education teachers plays a major role in shaping their experiences. For example, according to Haegele and colleagues (2017), individuals with visual impairments reflected a belief that their teachers viewed them as *flawed* or *unable*, which influenced more negative effects on the individual's physical education experience.

Among the first studies to examine the experiences of individuals with visual impairments in physical education, Haegele and Zhu (2017) conducted an interviewed-based study using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the retrospective reflections of 16 adults with visual impairments during school physical education. In this study, participants reported experiences of fear and frustration, belittlement and discrimination, and feelings of being viewed as *worthless* by their physical education teachers. Additionally, Haegele and Zhu (2017) stated that participants believed their teachers viewed them as *flawed*, which influenced other negative effects on the individual's physical education experience. Not only did

the negative effects impact the participants physical education experiences, but also affected them emotionally; one participant expressed “In some ways, it was harmful emotionally because it was a time when it was more than obvious that I was different and separate from my peers” (Haegele & Zhu, 2017, p.430). These feeling of being *flawed*, different, and separate influenced negative views of the meaning of participation during physical education; “I think that since I started to hate it, I did not try and get any meaning out of it. There was nothing I was open to learning” (Haegele & Zhu, 2017, p.430), impacting the participant’s decision of self-exclusion and not wanting to participate.

A similar study, conducted by Haegele and Buckley (2019), examined four youths with visual impairments from Alaska and their experiences in physical education, with a purpose to: better understand how youth perceived lessons and activities, and how they interacted with teachers and peers. In this study, participants conveyed that the addition of accommodation during physical education made a difference in their participation (Haegele & Buckley, 2019). This accommodation ranged from the use of colorful or bright color balls, having an adapted physical education teacher in class, or simply having a teacher who made an effort to talk with and check in with the student with a visual impairment. Additionally, they stated that peer relationships were difficult to build and caused a hindrance in wanting to participate (Haegele & Buckley, 2019). One participant stated that his peers would not even let him try an activity even though he was very interested in playing (Haegele & Buckley, 2019). Another participant expressed his peers could have made more of an effort to talk him, so they could get to know each other (Haegele & Buckley, 2019). Instances of poor peer relationships, like those expressed in this study, can lead to social isolation, bullying, and self-exclusion (Fitzgerald, 2005).

According to the existing research, individuals with a visual impairment tend to struggle

to feel welcomed, wanted, and valued in physical education settings (Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele & Zhu, 2017). Facing a number of negative experiences may prevent these individuals from being able to, and subsequently wanting to, be involved and participate. The uninterested attitudes and lack of effort from the physical education teachers have a major impact on the perspectives of individuals with visual impairments towards physical education (Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele & Zhu, 2017). Complicating experiences further are poor peer interactions and relationships, bullying, name calling, and exclusion (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele & Zhu, 2017). Research has revealed the immense impact these negative factors have on the experiences of individuals with visual impairments towards physical education.

### **Athletes with Visual Impairments in Physical Education**

To date, just one study has examined how elite athletes with visual impairments experienced physical education. Haegele, Zhu, and Davis (2017) collaborated on a study examining the meaning of physical education and sport among elite athletes with visual impairments. This phenomenological study described the experiences of four elite male goalball players and how their experiences in physical education shaped them as athletes (Haegele et al., 2017). In the study, participant's narratives helped create four major themes: (a) physical education teachers are central to physical education experiences; (b) internalized exclusion; (c) athletic identity struggle; and (d) extracurricular opportunity.

The first theme described how physical education teachers were central to physical education experiences among the participants. Half of the participants described their physical education teachers as being supportive. For example, one participant expressed having good instruction and accommodations for all lessons (Haegele et al., 2017), and another participant

described his teacher as never telling him he couldn't do something and that there was always some activity in which he was participating (Haegele et al., 2017). On the other hand, two participants recalled that they were set aside to *watch* and no accommodation were introduced to create a learning environment for all (Haegele et al., 2017). For example, one participant stated "It (physical education) was probably the least favorite part of my day" (Haegele et al., 2017, p. 382). The second theme, internalized exclusion, focused on peer relationships. Several of the participants recalled a positive experience with physical education teachers but, experienced some quantity of exclusion from peers during activities or lessons more often than not. However, in some instances, exclusion was the participants' choice (Haegele et al., 2017). One participant stated, "I think I probably excluded myself because I enjoyed goalball and I enjoyed weight-lifting more than I enjoyed being involved with other high school students who were not very good athletes." (Haegele et al., 2017, p. 384). Whether exclusion is initiated by the teacher or the student themselves, it can cause major setbacks in peer relationships.

The third theme, athletic identity struggle, included recollections of how the participants' identities as athletes influenced their physical education experiences. Three of the participants identified as athletes while in school and reported that their athletic capabilities and success helped change peer's perspective of them from being just a person with a disability to being an athlete (Haegele et al., 2017). Identifying as an athlete during youth, including individuals with visual impairments, can impact physical activities and peer relationships while in school. The final theme, extracurricular opportunity, mainly focused on how physical education assisted the participants in finding their own different outside physical activity in which to partake (Haegele et al., 2017). For several of the participants in this study, physical education enhanced their understanding of their athletic abilities later in life (Haegele et al., 2017).

This study investigated physical education experiences among male, elite athletes, with a visual impairment (Haegele et al., 2017). Examining only males still leaves the experiences of female elite athletes with a visual impairment unknown. Haegele and colleagues (2017) opened the discussion of athletes with visual impairment in the environment of physical education class, but only investigated one side. Thus, the current study can help close the gap in this understanding by exploring the experiences and perspectives of female athletes with visual impairments in physical education class.

### **Gender and Visual Impairment in Physical Education**

In recent years, studies that investigated and specifically examined gender and visual impairments in physical education have surfaced. For example, Haegele and colleagues (2018) focused on female students with visual impairments in physical education and Haegele and Kirk (2018) focused on the experiences of male students with visual impairments in physical education. From an early age, children have a clear concept of what is expected of their gender and how to behave based on how society portrays *male* and *female* (Kirk, 2003). Gender in physical education is used to create constraints on individuals based on social stereotypes and *common-sense* gender ideals (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005); just as disabilities are seen as constraints or having limitation. Females tend to experience judgement for their sports competency, social pressure to uphold the stereotypical *ideal* feminine body of being thin, slender, and embarrassment for their non-sporty abilities (Oliver et al., 2009; Hills, 2007). Females are expected to nurture their emotions, be supportive, and care for their appearance while participating in physical education (Adler et al., 1992). However, males are held to a different standard and much more is expected from them in physical education. Males are anticipated to be competitive, strong, tough, aggressive and passionate players in physical

education (Adler et al., 1992). The *top-dog* competitive mentality is a type of social pressure males face in physical education when they are expected to with-hold that stereotypical culture (Brown & Evans, 2004).

Most relevant to the current study is that of Haegele and colleagues (2018). Using an intersectional approach, the purpose of Haegele and colleagues' research was to study the experiences of individuals identifying as females and as having a visual impairment in physical education. Adult women, ages 21-30, with visual impairments were interviewed, and three themes from the participant's interviews were constructed: (a) "Girls don't like gym anyway", (b) "She can't do what other kids can do", and (c) "It was really awkward". The first theme, "girls don't like gym anyway", showed the influence of gender and visual impairment identities on participation, or non-participation, in physical education activities. For example, one participant, who attended public school, was removed from physical education after fourth grade due to "safety reason" and expressed she "just didn't have many opportunities" (Haegele et al., 2018). Several participants expressed having negative feelings about physical education because of limited participation, alternative activities, and exclusionary practices (Haegele et al., 2018). As exemplified by the theme title quote, however, many of the participants relied on their gender identity to justify their lack of participation, noting that physical education isn't something girls do anyway.

The second theme, "She can't do what other kids can do", was largely influenced by the physical education teacher's expectations of the students with visual impairments as being *unable* or *flawed* (Haegele et al., 2018). The participants in this study reported perceived experiences of their physical education teachers having low expectations for them based on their visual impairments. One participant stated "They (physical education teachers) probably thought

there was nothing they can do for me. Like ‘What’s the point of trying to get to know this student when I’m not going to be able to help her? She can’t do what other kids can do.’ It probably seemed like a waste of time” (Haegele et al., 2018, p. 304). Another participant stated, “expectations for me to fail, so to spare my feeling they just encouraged me not to try” (Haegele et al., 2018, p.304). The excuse of “...it would be too dangerous” was used on a participant in physical education by her teacher (Haegele et al., 2018, p. 304). The participants also felt as if the boys in the class were held to a higher expectation than the girls because boys were supposed to be able to do more (Haegele et al., 2018). The participants felt frustrated and confused by these genders-based expectations of males being better than females physically which were influenced by the physical education teachers (Haegele et al., 2018). A participant expressed irritation and reported, “The boys had to do ‘boy push-ups’ and girls has to do ‘girl push-ups.’ Like, the bar for the boys was a little higher than the girls.” (Haegele et al., 2018, p.304). The gender biased assumption influenced by the physical education teachers caused extreme discomfort and frustration for the participants according to Haegele and colleagues (2018), leading to their lack of interest and participation in physical education. From the participants experiences it was evident that their teachers viewed them as *unable* and *flawed* (Haegele et al., 2018).

The final theme of this study, “It was really awkward”, was influenced by negative and poor peer interaction, which was largely informed by the perspective of individuals with visual impairments being *unable* (Haegele et al., 2018). Many of the participants experienced bullying during their physical education classes reporting, “It just seemed like they (peers) didn’t care if I got hurt. I felt like they kind of bullied me” (Haegele et al., 2018, p. 305). Another participant expressed her peer bullying as “pretty intentional stuff” making her experience feelings such as

“ostracized in a way, since I was made to feel like I wasn’t part of the group” (Haegele et al., 2018, p. 305). From an intersectional perspective, an interesting development in this study was that participants reported that their bullies were largely males, and that the teasing they experienced stemmed from stereotypes and conceptualization of the perceived abilities of females in sports (Haegele et al., 2018). The purpose of Haegele and associates’ study (2018), was to examine the experiences of females having a visual impairment on their physical education and how identifying as such affected those experiences. These three themes contribute to the understanding of how multiple identities can cause disadvantages in physical education

Similar to Haegele and colleagues (2018), Haegele and Kirk (2018) also utilized an intersectional approach, but with the purpose of examining males with visual impairments on their experiences in physical education. Adult males, ages 18-33 with a visual impairment participated in this study, and three themes emerged from the data: (a) “I didn’t feel very integrated”, (b) “Oh great, where’s my cane now?”, and (c) “Okay, just do what you can” (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). The first theme, “I didn’t feel very integrated”, described issues with engaging in activities and was primarily influenced by the perspective that individuals with visual impairments have a lack of ability to participate (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). This type of perspective and opinion of individuals with visual impairments played a major part in why physical education teachers excluded them from participation and put them to the side. One participant expressed “They (the physical education teacher) would give me a football, put me to the side, and I would throw a football back and forth with someone while the other students had the luxury of playing a sport like basketball, badminton, or soccer” (Haegele & Kirk, 2018, p. 204). There was little to no effort by the teachers in attempting to modify activities for the participants. This type of treatment had a profound effect on the participants, where it was



reported that physical education experiences were terrible, causing one participant to become upset and angered during instances where he didn't understand why he couldn't try the activity with other students (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). These experiences were very similar to the ones of the female participants in Haegele and associates (2018), with having poor instruction and feeling left out and excluded during activities.

The second theme, "Oh great, where's my cane now?", described accounts of bullying the participants experienced in physical education class by their peers (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). Bullying has been a major and common theme discovered in a handful of studies about people with visual impairments and physical education (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele et al., 2018; Haegele & Kirk, 2018). One participant reported, "I think people just picked my eyesight because it was an easy target" (Haegele & Kirk, 2018, p.207). Being a male didn't help the bullying situation either as re-counted by one of the participants; "I think being a boy put me in that situation, being in a locker room within close proximity of them (bullies)" (Haegele & Kirk, 2018, p.207). Another participant had a similar experience, but once he began to partake successfully in a sport, he was no longer viewed as a person with a disability, but as being an athlete (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). He expressed "got bullied until I could no longer get bullied", and his former bullies "became teammates and then the few guys who could bully didn't because they had the respect of being teammates" (Haegele & Kirk, 2018, p. 207-208). As such, athletic capability and success helped change some peer's perception of individuals with visual impairments (Haegele et al., 2017). The final theme, "Okay, just do what you can", stemmed from not feeling challenged or a part of the competitive atmosphere (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). Participants expressed their physical education experiences was not rigorous enough for them (Haegele & Kirk, 2018). "The isolated class definitely felt boring. The physical activity required of us was

definitely not intense enough, at least by my standard” was reported by one of the participants contributing to their negative perspective on physical education (Haegele & Kirk, 2018, p. 208).

The themes in both studies were very similar and raised parallel concerns for both male and female students with visual impairments in a physical education setting. The lack of interest and effort from teachers, poor peer interaction and relationships leading to bullying and isolation, and the assumption and preserved thought of not being *able* to fully participate were common and constant challenges faced by individuals with visual impairments in a physical education setting causing a negative perception towards physical education (Haegele et al., 2018; Haegele & Kirk, 2018). A logical extension of this line of inquiry would be to examine females or males with visual impairments, who have additional identities that may contribute to their experiences in physical education. By using an intersectional approach to investigate experiences of female athletes with visual impairments in physical education it will allow more understanding behind one’s perspective and opinions.

### **Intersectionality**

All identities and experiences are intersectional (Cuthbert, 2017). In the current study, the concept of intersectionality was used to explore the physical education experiences of individuals identifying as a female, having a visual impairment, and as an athlete. When intersectionality was first developed, it was to open people’s eyes to the oppression faced by Black women, and the unique contribution that race and gender played in influencing that oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1977). These Black women challenged mainstream women to think about how oppressive experiences associated being a woman might intersect with oppressive experiences associated with being African American during the 1970’s and 1980’s (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Each identity crosses and overlaps, providing effects and meaning of

membership to each group. Thus, rather than viewing features such as race, disability, and gender identity as separate attributes, they should be considered in an intersecting fashion and how the traits together form experiences. This framework provides a scope to recognize individual's multiple identities and how these identities influence successes or difficulties (Moodley & Graham, 2015).

Over the years, intersectionality has expanded, changed and broadened in scope to allow more understanding and more investigation in identities. Intersectionality provides a conceptual framework and in recent research has been used to investigate how several identities influence experiences in physical education (Dagkas, 2016). To date, research has utilized intersectionality to examine how a number of identities influence physical education experiences, including identities related to gender and religion (Dagkas et al., 2011), gender and race (Azzarito, 2009), and gender, race, and social class (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005). More aligned with the current study, research has examined the intersection of identities related to gender and visual impairment (Haegele & Kirk, 2018; Haegele et al., 2018) and overweightness and visual impairment (Haegele, Zhu, & Holland, 2019). For the purpose of this study, the conceptual framework approach of intersectionality was utilized to investigate the experiences of those who identify as a female athlete with a visual impairment in physical education.

## **Summary**

There have been many prominent findings in literature examining the perspectives of those with disabilities, particularly individuals with visual impairments, toward physical education. The research has assisted in gaining an understanding of how individuals with disabilities experience physical education. Many of the studies reviewed uncovered similar results and common themes were present. The Haegele and Buckley (2019) and Haegele and

Zhu (2017) interview-based studies each constructed three themes from the experiences of students with visual impairments and reported salient features that included poor teachers, the lack of interest and effort from the teachers, poor peer interaction and relationships leading to bullying and isolation, and the assumption and preserved thought of not being *able* to fully participate. These common challenges faced by individuals with visual impairments in a physical education setting caused a negative perception towards physical education. Haegele and colleagues (2017) explained and described the experiences of athletes with visual impairments in physical education and had very similar and key themes to previous studies discussed.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to implement an intersectional approach and gain insight into the reflection about lived experiences of female athletes with visual impairments during school physical education. The following chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study, including research design, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

#### **Research Approach**

In order to describe the participants' intersectional experiences as female athletes with a visual impairment, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach was implemented. The IPA approach is dedicated to the detailed exploration of personal meaning and lived experiences (Smith, 2015). IPA explores how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith, 2015). It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, perspectives, and motivations in people's experiences. Smith (2015) explains when using IPA, it is important to create an interview environment where the participant can express their experiences openly and honestly with the interviewer. This analysis is grounded in the participants' retrospective recall of experiences and emotion. In IPA analysis, it asks the participants to go back to a certain situation and rediscover the emotions that occurred at that moment. In the current study, the researcher was interested in examining the participant's reflections about their lived experiences in a physical education setting as a person who identified as being a female, an athlete, and as having a visual impairment. Thus, the researchers not only analyzed participants' experiences in physical education and sport but also the intersection of their gender, athlete, and disability-related identities and how those identities effected their lived experiences.

#### **Participants**

The target population for this study were female, elite athletes who have a visual impairment. The female participants were elite athletes, individuals who have or currently are competing at a professional, national, or international level on a team or as an individual. This group offered a limited population to select from and therefore a small study sample of four participants were selected; however, this was congruent with the selected study design.

Participants were recruited based on a set of predetermined eligibility specific criteria. Eligibility criteria included individuals who (a) identified as being female; (b) identified as having a visual impairment during K-12 physical education experience; (c) identified as being an elite athlete and part of a professional, national, or international team or as an individual; (d) were between 18 and 40-years of age; (e) were willing to participate in a telephone/video call interview for approximately 60-minutes; (f) and were willing to keep in contact following the interview for follow-up questions. The specific age range selected helped ensure that the participants experienced all levels of K-12 education and could re-live specific recollections from physical education.

Participants in this study included four female, elite athletes with visual impairments who ranged in age from ranged 23 to 28-years old. Three out of the four participants identified as Caucasian and one identified as both Caucasian and African American. Pseudonyms were utilized to describe participants to protect the identity of the four participants.

Barb is a 24-year-old, Caucasian female who has congenital Glaucoma and Cataracts. She wears glasses, with a very strong prescription, to compensate for the lack of lens in her eyes. She is legally blind with correction, and her vision has been stable her whole life. Barb is a current member of the USA Women's National goalball team. She competed in the 2016 Rio Paralympics where her team won a bronze medal. Barb has competed in two world

Championships and two Para Pan American Games in goalball. She helped Team USA qualify for the next Paralympics last summer at the IBSA Qualifier and is hoping to help the team with a gold medal in the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics coming up. She is a full-time athlete in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which is the official Paralympic resident center in the sport of goalball. Outside of international competitions, Barb competes domestically in goalball tournaments across the US. Her team took second place last year at the 2019 Nationals.

Sam is a 28 -year-old, Caucasian female who has retinitis pigmentosa (RP). RP causes Sam to have very little useable vision. She can see shadows and light contrasts, but she mainly sees “shapes and blobs”. She had better vision as a child until around third grade, where her vision progressively worsened until middle school before becoming stable. Sam was an elite alpine skier from 2011-2014. She was on the USA National Paralympic Alpine Ski team and went to the 2014 Sochi Winter Paralympics. Now she runs marathons for fun and hopes to pursue triathlons in the near future.

Patty is a 25-year-old, Caucasian and African American female who has a congenital disease called Aniridia. Aniridia causes Patty to have no iris in either eye, so light is never filtered when entering her eyes. It causes Patty to be severely visually impaired making it difficult for her to see well. Patty’s vision has always been mostly stable. Patty was a member of the USA National Goalball team in 2011. She’s competed in two Paralympic Games, London 2012 and Rio 2016, where her team won a bronze medal. She competed in three Para Pan American Games and two World Championships. Patty continues to train in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with Barb, at the official Paralympic resident center in the sport of goalball for Tokyo 2021 Paralympic games.

Alison is a 23-year-old, Caucasian female who has achromatopsi, a genetic eye condition

that affect the light receptors in her eyes causing her to be light sensitive and see limited color. She has been legally blind since birth. She was a two-time Paralympian for Alpine skiing. Alison competed in the Sochi 2014 Paralympic games and 2018 Paralympic games in alpine skiing events. She also spent four years competing on the World Cup circuit and skied in World Championship races, and National Championship races where she medaled.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this study occurred during the fall-winter of 2019. This study utilized two sources of data: interviews and reflective notes. The primary source of the data was informal, audio-taped, telephone/video call interviews completed by the author. Due to the large distance between the participants and author, telephone/video call interviews were used in lieu of face-to-face interviews. The interviews lasted between 52 to 76-minutes. The secondary source of data were reflective notes taken by the interviewer during and after the telephone/video call interviews. Procedures of data collection for the current study were adopted from similar research focusing on physical education experiences in youth with a visual impairment (Haegele & Buckley, 2019).

The interviews began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study, as well as gaining consent to conduct the interview. Each interview was guided by a semi-structured interview guide, which included questions informed by the IPA framework and intersectionality focus of the study. This style of interview allowed for a more conversational-based interview (Haegele & Buckley, 2019). The guide was used in a flexible manner to allow the interviewee to control the order and degree of the discussed material. The same basic guidelines were used for all participants. Sample question included: (a) can you describe what your experiences in K-12 physical education were like?; (b) can you describe how having a visual impairment impacted



your physical education experience?; (c) how has being a female manipulated your physical education experience?; and (d) how has being an athlete influenced your physical education experiences?

Reflective notes were taken by the interviewer as the interviews were conducted and immediately following each interview. These notes included how the author was feeling about the conversation, initial thoughts on what the interviewee said, initial feelings about the interviewee's tone, and residual thoughts about developing topics (Smith & Sparks, 2017). The reflective note taking process helped record any personal bias from the interviewer that may affect the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Immediately following the data collection, the audiotaped interviews were transcribed, verbatim, by the author. Transcripts of the interview showed all words spoken by both the interviewer and interviewee and provide a semantic record of the interview. Long pauses, nonverbal remarks, and clearly unrelated information were not noted in the transcript because the content did not relate to the participants experiences central to the current study analysis.

Following the transcriptions, a four-step process, recommended by Smith and colleagues (2009), was utilized to construct themes. First, the author carefully read and re-read each transcript and became familiar with the content and associated the reflection (Smith & Sparks, 2017). Data from transcripts and reflection notes were then reduced into initial themes at the case level. The third step was to search for patterns and connections across all the participants by constant comparison. Finding patterns helped establish themes and commonalties between the participants (Smith et al., 2009). The final step of the analysis consisted of a discussion between the research team which focused on the constructed themes and those that were aligned with the

research focus and conceptual framework.

### **Trustworthiness**

Approaches presented by Yardley (2000), Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012), and Smith and colleagues (2009) were followed to help support the trustworthiness of the current study. The interviewer described her view and position to the participants at the start of each interview which helped to expose bias (Yardley, 2000). The study used the support of an interview guide that had been created for individuals with visual impairments (Haegele & Zhu, 2017) and had been adjusted to align with the purpose of the study. Yardley (2000) encouraged researchers to specifically describe the position of the researcher, the recruitment process, transcriptions, interviews, and analysis techniques to support the transparency and consistency of the study. Another strategy that was utilized to enhance trustworthiness was the collaboration efforts between the researcher and her panel of experts (Petty et al., 2012). The researcher worked with the panel of experts, with experience in physical education, special education, and qualitative methodologies, to plan the study. The panel of experts assisted in the creation of the semi-structured interview guide by reviewing and providing critiques prior to implementation (Petty et al. 2012). Additionally, an ample number of verbatim quotes from the interview transcripts were utilized throughout the results to ensure the participants' voices were heard and integrated into the research (Smith et al., 2009).

## CHAPTER IV: MANUSCRIPT

### **Experiences in Physical Education and Sport: The Intersection of Identifying as a Female, an Athlete, and Visually Impaired**

### **Abstract**

**Introduction.** Individuals with visual impairments, females, and athletes encounter different challenges during physical education. However, little is known about how the challenges connected with each of these identities intersect and if that intersection impacts experiences differently. The purpose of this study was to take an explicitly intersectional approach to understand how identifying as an individual with a visual impairment, a female, and an athlete intersect to influence physical education and sport experiences. **Methods.** To describe the participants' intersectional experiences as female athletes with a visual impairment, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach was implemented. Four female athletes with visual impairments aged 23-28-years old, participated in this study. The study utilized two sources of data: semi-structured, audio-taped, telephone/video call interviews and reflective interview notes. Data were analyzed thematically using a three-step process guided by IPA. **Results.** From the data collected and analyzed, two connected, major themes were constructed (a) Physical education was 'just a credit' and (b) 'If you enjoy this, we will drive you'. **Discussion.** The results of this study aligned with prior research (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele & Zhu, 2017), by demonstrating the participants did not have meaningful physical education experiences. Interestingly, however, the participants noted that these poor experiences were not critical to them, as they had developed a sense of athletic identity in other, outside of school physical activity opportunities supported by family.

## **Experiences in Physical Education and Sport: The Intersection of Identifying as a Female, an Athlete, and Visually Impaired**

In the recent years, research attention has shifted to investigate the perspective of those with disabilities about their personal experiences in physical education (Byrnes & Rickards, 2011). This area of study has provided those with disabilities a voice to express their thoughts, feelings, and frustrations about their personal experiences in physical education classes (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkins, 2010). Both positive and negative experiences that individuals with disabilities have encountered during physical education have been uncovered through this research (Fitzgerald, 2005). Positive experiences, such as active participation supported by teacher accommodations and supportive teacher-student relationships, may influence the student's opinion and attitude towards physical education and may help build upon peer relationships in other classes (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Unfortunately, negative experiences, including instances of bullying, social isolation and different methods of judgement, were more commonly reported (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). These negative experiences may have an impact on the attitudes of students with disabilities toward physical education and lead to self-selected exclusion and isolation from future activities (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015) which may ultimately lead to poor health (Warburton, Nicol & Bredin, 2006).

The type of disability one experiences can impact the way they engage in physical education. Given that youth with visual impairments have been identified as not engaging in adequate physical activity to reap health-related outcomes (Haegele & Porretta, 2015), they may be one such group of interest. Examining the existing literature on the views/perspectives of those with a visual impairment in physical education exposed a number of findings. For example,

in physical education, students with visual impairments tended to experience fear and frustration, were demeaned and discriminated against, and at times felt worthless in the eyes of physical education teachers (Haegele & Zhu, 2017). According to Haegele and Zhu (2017), who interviewed adults with visual impairments about their experiences in integrated physical education settings, participants reflected that they believed their teachers viewed their bodies as being *flawed*, which informed other negative effects on the individual's physical education experience. Feelings of being *worthless*, *flawed* or *incapable*, which have appeared across several studies examining physical education from the perspectives of those with visual impairments, can steer individuals with visual impairments to self-selected exclusion and avoidance of physical education activities. As such, it is not surprising that Yessick and Haegele (2019) reported that adults with visual impairments viewed physical education as ineffective, and many who did engage in physical activity throughout the lifespan were introduced to exercise in other forums.

While research has now thorough explored reflections of adults with visual impairment toward physical education, little is known about how other identities (e.g., gender) affect these experiences. Identities are aspects of who we are, which locate us in the social world, and thoroughly affect everything we do, say, and feel in our lives. As such, this study was conceptually guided by Crenshaw's interpretation of intersectionality. Intersectionality provides a conceptual framework to explore the intersections between identities and how they influence physical education experiences. In the 1970's and 1980's, intersectionality was developed by Black feminists challenging White feminists to think about how the oppression that comes with being a woman could be compounded by the oppressive experiences with being African American (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Intersectionality was later broadened to embrace

the idea that all identities and experiences are intersectional (Cuthbert, 2017). Besides viewing individual's traits (i.e., gender, race, disability) as isolated traits, intersectionality views the intersections between them and how these traits shape experiences (Cuthbert, 2017).

Intersectionality therefore was considered to provide conceptual framework approach to explore and understand an individual's multiple identities and how they combine to form experiences in specific contexts (Moodley & Graham, 2015).

Little attention has been paid to understanding how other identities intersect and influence physical education among those with visual impairments. For example, from an early age, children have a clear concept of what is expected of their gender and how to behave based on how society portrays (or identifies of) *male* and *female* (Kirk, 2003). In a physical education setting, it is assumed that the males in the class are the *top-dog* participants with a competitive culture to showcase their masculinity (Brown & Evans, 2004). Physical education teachers have certain opinions and expectations of what both males and females are capable of doing in physical education. Males are expected to be competitive, strong, tough, aggressive, and passionate players in physical education, where females are expected to nurture their emotions, be supportive, and care for their appearance (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992). The participation rate for females in physical education has been of major concern for many years (Daley & Buchanan, 1999). The lack of participation from females appears to be influenced by societal stereotypes and expectations learned, observed, and forced upon women which expects them to act a certain way (Constantinou, Manson & Silverman, 2009).

A conflicting identity, which has starkly different expectations in physical education than *traditional* females, are female athletes. A strong athletic identity can have both positive and negative outcomes and can create a feeling of empowerment (Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002).

Female athletes in physical education setting tend to be motivated, competitive, and confident in their abilities and skills (Marsh et al., 1997). Since high-intensity sport requires athletes to have advanced muscular strength, speed, agility, and power, along with developed technical skills and decision-making abilities (Gabbett, Jenkins & Abernethy, 2009), these skills tend to separate athletes from their peers in terms of skill level when they are placed into a physical education setting (Gabbett et al., 2009). Thus, female athletes tend to experience a conflicting role in physical education, where one's identity as a female and one's identity as an athlete may combat each other to inform behavior.

It is understood that individuals with visual impairments, females, and athletes encounter different challenges during physical education. However, little is known about how the challenges connected with each of these identities intersect and if that intersect impact experiences differently. This study took an explicitly intersectional perspective to examine the obstacles female athletes with a visual impairment faced during their personal experiences in physical education and youth sport. The results of this study may be utilized to implement appropriate strategies into the physical education setting that fosters an inclusive environment for students with visual impairments and to create applicable tactics to foster a comfortable learning environment for female athletes during sport. As such, the purpose of this study was to take an explicitly intersectional approach to understand how identifying as an individual with a visual impairment, a female, and an athlete intersect to influence physical education and sport experiences.

## **Methods**

### **Research Approach**



In order to explore the participants' intersectional experiences as female athletes with a visual impairment, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach was adopted. The IPA approach is dedicated to the detailed exploration of personal meaning and lived experiences (Smith, 2015). IPA explores how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith, 2015). It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, perspectives, and motivations in people's experiences. IPA studies ask participants to return to a certain situation and rediscover the emotions that occurred at that moment. In the current study, the researcher was interested in examining the participants' reflection about their lived experiences in a physical education setting as a person who identified as being a female, an athlete, and as having a visual impairment. Thus, the researchers not only analyzed participants' experiences in physical education and sport but also the intersectional nature of their gender, athlete, and disability-related identities and how those identities affected their lived experience.

### **Participants**

The target population for this study were female, elite athletes who had a visual impairment. Participants were all elite athletes, who have or who currently are competing at a professional, national, or international level on a team or as an individual. This group offered a limited population to select from and therefore a small study sample was expected. Small samples, however, are congruent with IPA studies, which recommend between four and six participants for in-depth examinations of experience. Participants were recruited based on a set of predetermined eligibility specific criteria. Eligibility criteria included individuals who (a) identified as being female; (b) identified as having a visual impairment during K-12 physical education experience; (c) identified as being an elite athlete and part of a professional, national, or international team or as an individual; (d) were between 18 and 40-years of age; (e) were

willing to participate in a telephone or video call interview for approximately 60 minutes; (f) and were willing to keep in contact following the interview for follow up questions. The specific age range selected helped to ensure that the participants experienced all levels of K-12 education and could re-live specific recollections from physical education.

Participants in this study included four female, elite athletes, between the ages of 23 to 28- years old, with visual impairments. Three out of the four participants identified as Caucasian and one identified as both Caucasian and African American. Pseudonyms were utilized to describe participants to protect the identity of the four participants.

Barb is a 24-year-old, Caucasian female who has congenital Glaucoma and Cataracts. She wears glasses, with a very strong prescription, to compensate for not having lens. She is legally blind with correction, and her vision has been stable throughout her whole life. Barb is a current member of the USA Women's National goalball team. She competed in the 2016 Rio Paralympics where her team won a bronze medal. Barb has competed in two world Championships and two Para Pan American Games in goalball. She helped Team USA qualify for the next Paralympics last summer at the IBSA Qualifier and is hoping to help the team with a gold medal in the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics coming up. She is a full-time athlete in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which is the official Paralympic resident center in the sport of goalball. Outside of international competitions, Barb competes domestically in goalball tournaments across the US. Her team took second place last year at the 2019 Nationals.

Sam is a 28 -year-old, Caucasian female who has retinitis pigmentosa (RP). RP causes Sam to have very little useable vision. She can see shadows and light contrasts, but she mainly sees "shapes and blobs". She had better vision as a child until around third grade, where her vision progressively worsened until middle school when it stabilized. Sam was an elite alpine

skier from 2011-2014. She was on the USA National Paralympic Alpine Ski team and went to the 2014 Sochi Winter Paralympics. Now she runs marathons for fun and hopes to pursue triathlons in the near future.

Patty is a 25-year-old, Caucasian and African American female who has a congenital disease called Aniridia. Aniridia causes Patty to have no iris in either eye, so light is never filtered when entering her eyes. It causes Patty to be severely visually impaired making it difficult for her to see well. Patty's vision has remained stable throughout her life. . Patty has been a member of the USA National Goalball team 2011. She's competed in two Paralympic Games, London 2012 and Rio 2016, where her team won a bronze medal. She competed in three Para Pan American Games and two World Championships. Patty continues to train in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with Barb, at the official Paralympic resident center in the sport of goalball for Tokyo 2021 Paralympic games.

Alison is a 23-year-old, Caucasian female who has achromatopsi, a genetic eye condition that affect the light receptors in her eyes causing her to be light sensitive and see limited color. She has been legally blind since birth. She is a two-time Paralympian for Alpine skiing. Alison competed in the Sochi 2014 Paralympic games and 2018 Paralympic games in alpine skiing events. She also spent four years competing on the World Cup circuit and skied in World Championship races, and National Championship races where she medaled.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this study occurred in the fall-winter of 2019-2020. The study utilized two sources of data: interviews and reflective notes. Three of the interviews were over telephone and one was over a video conferencing platform. The primary source of the data was informal, audio-taped, telephone interviews completed by the author. Due to the large distance

between participants and author, telephone/video call interviews were used in lieu of face-to-face interviews. Interviews were approximately 50 to 75-minutes each. Each interview began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study, as well as encouragement for participants to ask any questions prior to audio recording. Each participant provided informed consent to participate. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guide, which included questions informed by the IPA framework and intersectionality focus of the study. The guide was used in a flexible manner which allowed the interviewee to control the order and degree of the discussed material (Smith, 2015). The same basic guidelines were used for all participants.

The secondary source of data were reflective notes taken by the interviewer as the interviews were being conducted and immediately after each interview. These notes included how the interviewer felt about the conversation, initial thoughts on what the interviewee said, initial feelings about the interviewee's tone, and residual thoughts about developing topics (Smith & Sparks, 2017). The reflective note taking process helped record any personal bias from the interviewer that may have affected the interviews.

### **Data Analysis and Trustworthiness**

Once the data collection was complete, the audiotaped interviews were transcribed, verbatim, by the author. Transcripts of the interview showed all words that were spoken by both the interviewer and interviewee and provided a semantic record of the interview. Following the transcriptions, a four-step process, recommended by Smith and colleagues (2009), was utilized to construct themes. First, the author carefully read and re-read each transcript and became familiar with the content and associated the reflection (Smith & Sparks, 2017). Data from transcripts and reflection notes were then reduced into initial themes at the case level. The third step was to search for patterns and connections across all the participants by constant comparison. Finding

patterns helped establish themes and commonalties between the participants (Smith et al., 2009). The final step of the analysis consisted of a discussion between the research team members which focused on the constructed themes and those that were aligned with the research focus and conceptual framework.

The author followed approaches presented by Yardley (2000), Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012), and Smith and colleagues (2009) to help support the trustworthiness of the current study. The interviewer described her view and position to the participants at the start of each interview which helped to expose bias (Yardley, 2000). The study used the support of an interview guide that had been created for individuals with visual impairments (Haegele & Zhu, 2017) and had been adjusted to align with the purpose of the study. Yardley (2000) encouraged researchers to specifically describe the position of the researcher, the recruitment process, transcriptions, interviews, and analysis techniques to support the transparency and consistency of the study. Another strategy that was utilized to enhance trustworthiness was the collaboration efforts between the researcher and her panel of experts (Petty et al., 2012). The researcher worked with the panel of experts, with experience in physical education, special education, and qualitative methodologies, to plan the study. The panel of experts assisted in the creation of the semi-structured interview guide by reviewing and providing critiques prior to implementation (Petty et al. 2012). Additionally, an ample number of verbatim quotes from the interview transcripts were utilized throughout the results to ensure the participants voices were heard and integrated into the research (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Results and Discussion**

From the data collected and analyzed, two interrelated themes were constructed (a) Physical Education was ‘just a credit’ and (b) ‘If you enjoy this, we will drive you’.

### **Physical Education was ‘Just a Credit’**

While positive experiences are available, negative physical education experiences are more commonly described by individuals with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, during physical education (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele & Zhu, 2017). These findings were not different for the participants the current study, who largely reported negative experiences in physical education, mostly in middle school and high school settings. For example, when Barb discussed her visual impairment and how it influenced physical education, she shared that

It didn't seem like a high priority for P.E. teachers, or even my vision specialist, to figure out how to get me involved. It just kind of felt like [I needed to] go through the motions to get the credit.

According to Barb, neither educator made the effort to advocate for her participation in physical education, causing Barb to adopt a negative view toward her involvement. She continued by describing that “my teachers didn’t really strive to make sure I did great or learned” and that “I ended up feeling so awkward and uncomfortable and I was miserable because then I was watching everyone.” Barb’s experience, which was consistent with prior research (Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele, Zhu & Davis, 2017), demonstrated the power that teacher-student relationships can have in influencing student’s opinions toward physical education. This experience was reflected by other participants as well. For example, Sam had similar experiences with her physical education teachers “not caring” and expressed how being a female also affected her relationship with her physical education teacher, “the male teacher”. According to Sam, her physical education teacher was “an assistant football coach and didn't really care, he only cared about making friends with the guys and especially the football players.” Because of

these experiences, Sam found it hard to care about physical education, and noted: “I just didn't care that I didn't like P.E. I showed up, I did it, at times it was good but otherwise I just didn't want to be there.”

According to the participants, their relationships with their physical education teachers, and their views of physical education in general, were largely informed by their disability-related identity, and not their athlete- or gender-identity. For example, Sam recalled that “No, I don't think so, I think being visually impaired thing overrides that I'm a girl thing” and Patty recalled that “Being a female athlete, I don't think that being a female athlete particularly influence a huge amount in general, in my P.E.” This finding, that the participants’ visual impairment-related identity superseded that related to their gender, is consistent with findings from Haegele and colleagues (2018). Alison added to this, by noting that :

In terms of gym I was always just kind of doing it because I had to, I think. Like, I don't know, gym wasn't... It wasn't a factor that was influencing my self-esteem, it was just kind of a thing that I had to do to do the credit.

Based on the participants’ narratives, it was clear that they were disengaged from physical education, largely due to the way in which their physical education teacher viewed them, likely as unable or limited in their ability (Fitzgerald, 2005), in the physical education context. These types of experiences have emerged in prior research and may lead to feelings of being unwanted and flawed, which in turn may inform other negative effects such as self-removal from physical education altogether (Haegele et al., 2017). As such, it is not surprising that participants recalled efforts to escape physical education. For example, Sam recalled thinking “how can I get out of this period? P.E. was just not fun; I didn't get anything out of it. Except anxiety and

uncomfortable-ness” and Barb would often find herself asking, “Can I just go to study hall in the library...”

Generally speaking, adults with visual impairments who reflect on physical education as being negative tend to disengage from physical activity and sport in other contexts (Yessick & Haegele, 2019). Interestingly, this action was not the case among the participants in this study. That is, although physical education was viewed and portrayed as ‘just a credit’, and the participants were still very physically active outside of school. Perhaps this was mostly associated with their identities as athletes, which informed a tension between their experiences in physical education as youth with visual impairments, and their experiences in sport outside of school as athletes. Highlighting this, Alison recalled that

Physical education wasn't the only space where I could be active. And so, I guess in that sense, I was really lucky because P.E. wasn't too influential, and so even in times when I was excluded from activities, it didn't deter me from continuing to be athletic outside of school. I wasn't that motivated to be part of gym class, I didn't really care, I knew I was physically fit, I was doing workouts outside of school, and so in gym class, it was more social than anything, it wasn't about participating or being physically fit, it was more about being part of the class and being interacting with my peers.

Allison's reflection highlighted the tension between her roles in physical education and activity outside of school, where she was viewed, both by herself and others, as an athlete. According to Patty, identifying as an athlete took precedent over her participation in physical education, noting

I was so involved with goalball, I didn't even really take P.E., They [school staff] worked out a deal with my parents, and myself kind of saying, Okay, she is already training for goalball and so we're not going to make her do any of the P.E. credit hours, as far as in



school.

Patty explained her identity of being an athlete was more important to her than participating in physical education. Allison's and Patty's experiences showed the role in which being an athlete outside of school informed experiences in school-based physical education and suggested that perhaps the values they associated with sport outside of school made experiencing poorly designed physical education more acceptable. Perhaps Sam summarized this tension in the most direct and simple way, stating "I would say it didn't, as an athlete, I didn't like P.E." Similar to research examining physical education experiences among male athletes with visual impairments (Haegele et al, 2017), the participants attributed most of their development into athletes to their involvement in outside physical activity opportunities, limiting their desire or care for physical education.

### **'If You Enjoy This, We Will Drive You'**

The first theme depicts the negative experiences the participants in this study encountered during physical education, and a lack of care about those negative experiences due to the participants' engagement in physical activity opportunities elsewhere. The second theme, which had a clear interrelationship with the first theme, discussed the important role that the participant's families played in facilitating their participation in outside of school activities along with how meaningful these outside of school activities were to the participants and how they jump started their athletic identities. Highlighting the importance of family support, Sam recalled the commitment her family made to her athletic pursuits, stating that "we were all prepared, we were committed together to making the trip to the mountain [to ski]." According to the participants, the support they received from their family transcended just sport, and influenced the way they viewed themselves in the world. For example, Barb stated that "I didn't grow up feeling like I had a

disability”. Barb continued by admitting that her parents and family are the reason she has excelled in sports and physical activities, and that she believes that they are the reason for where she is now and she wouldn’t have gone as far if it wasn’t for them.

If I didn't grow up in the family in the environment that I did, I think it would have left me being like, ‘I don't know how to do sports, I'm not good at sports, I hate sports’, but because I had so many outside influences it overcame that, but if purely my P.E. experiences in school was what was going to shape me, I would have really very limited physical activity or sports in today. It's interesting because I came from a pretty athletic family and I have some vision. My experience is definitely different than some people who have less vision, and didn't grow up in an athletic environment.

The critical role that their families played in encouraging physical activity was evident across participants when they described the experiences they had outside of school. For example, after Patty discovered goalball at the sport education camp, she recalled their response, “My parents said, ‘Okay, if you enjoy this, we will drive you an hour to practice every weekend.’” The primary forum for physical activity that the participants reflected about were short-term sport education camps. Short-term sports education camps have been implemented nationwide in the United States and have become advocacy networks to facilitate physical fitness and self-advocacy through basic body mechanics and development of athletic skills (Ponchillia, Armbruster, & Wiebold, 2005). According to Patty, she found her main sport of goalball by attending these specific camps outside of school.

A little bit later there was an adapted sport education camp in Georgia, it was just a camp for people who are visually impaired. During this camp, they taught you all about adapted sports, any of the Paralympic sports that were going on in Athens at the time because the

camp was in 2005, and so I kind of learned about goalball there, and I learned it from different Paralympic athletes, so people who, had competed in the games under Team USA, they had their medals, they shared their stories and it was just kind of really inspiring just to hear their stories and say, like they're blind and they can do it too. And so, at that camp I was like, Wow, there's all these things that I can do and I love all these sports that they tried and it kind of gave me an opportunity to say, 'You know what, I can't say that I can't do something anymore because they showed, yeah, had to adapt soccer or how to adapt swimming or any of the sports where you feel like your visual impairment, gives you a disadvantage.' So I kind of came out of that camp and I learned about goalball. The camp was really helpful.

Like Patty, Sam and Barb attended similar camps. Sam noted that "I think my competitive drive started a sports camp", and Barb recalled that "I went to a sports camp for the first time and I was 14, and I came home and I was telling my parents, 'I tried the sport. it's called goalball, I love it, it's great.'" The meaning these participants ascribed to these sports camps was more broad than enhancing their athletic identity. For example, Barb continued to be actively involved in these sports camps as a volunteer, teaching young athletes today, because of the influence that these types of programs had on her as a youth. These findings were consistent with previous research which indicated approximately 42% of students with visual impairments had no to very limited access to physical education and athletic opportunities as youth (Ponchillia et al., 2005) suggesting short-term sport education camps were their main source of activity and exposure to sport.

### **Limitations and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to implement an intersectional approach and gain insight into the reflection about lived experiences of female athletes with visual impairments during

school physical education and sport. There were two main limitations in this study. First, the retrospective nature of the study may limit the participant's ability to recall detailed particularities of their experiences associated with some questions. Second, utilizing phone interviews may dilute the intimacy of the interview along with the ability of the interviewer to observe body language or facial expressions.

Using an IPA approach, two themes emerged from this study. The first theme, physical education was 'just a credit' showcased negative aspects associated with the participants' physical education experiences, and the role that student-teacher relationships played in shaping those experiences. The second theme, 'if you enjoy this, we will drive you', depicted the profound meaning that activities outside of physical education had for participants, and the role that families played in facilitating these experiences. This study took an explicitly intersectional approach, to attempt to understand how identifying as a female, an athlete, and an individual with a visual impairment influenced their experiences in physical education and sport.

Interestingly, clear depictions of how having a visual impairment and being an athlete influenced physical education and sport activities were present and consistent with the extant literature (Haeghele & Zhu, 2017; Haeghele et al., 2017). For example, participants recalled similar experiences of marginalization, such as feelings about receiving a lack of support from teachers (Haeghele, 2019), ubiquitous to research in this area of inquiry related to visual impairment identities. Interestingly though, few reflections described by the participants centered on the influence of identifying as a female in physical education, and notes about gendered inequities in physical education (Brown & Evans, 2004) were largely absent. This finding may suggest that identities associated with disability and athletic identity may have superseded those associated with gender, acting as a more powerful influence on their reflections on physical education.

Future research should continue to examine the influence of various identities on experiences in physical education, to help identify how best to provide meaningful experiences for people who may be otherwise marginalized in this educational context.

## References

- Adler, P. A., Kless, S. J., & Adler, P. (1992). Socialization to gender roles: Popularity among elementary school boys and girls. *Sociology of Education*, 14, 19-39.
- Brown, D., & Evans, J. (2004). Reproducing gender? Intergenerational links and the male PE teacher as a cultural conduit in teaching physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 23(1), 48-70.
- Byrnes, L. J., & Rickards, F. W. (2011). Listening to the voices of students with disabilities: Can such voices inform practice? *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 25-34.
- Combahee River Collective. (1977). *The Combahee River Collective Statement*. Available at: <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>. Accessed December 5th, 2017.
- Constantinou, P., Manson, M., & Silverman, S. (2009). Female students' perceptions about gender-role stereotypes and their influence on attitude toward physical education. *Physical Educator*, 66(2), 85.
- Cuthbert, K. (2017). You have to be normal to be abnormal: An empirically grounded exploration of the intersection of asexuality and disability. *Sociology*, 51(2), 241-257.
- Daley, A. J., & Buchanan, J. (1999). Aerobic dance and physical self-perceptions in female adolescents: Some implications for physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 70(2), 196-200.
- Fitzgerald, H. (2005). Still feeling like a spare piece of luggage? Embodied experiences of (dis)ability in physical education and school sport. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 10(1), 41-59. doi:10.1080/1740898042000334908

- Gabbett, T., Jenkins, D., & Abernethy, B. (2009). Game-based training for improving skill and physical fitness in team sport athletes. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(2), 273-283.
- Haegele, J. A., & Buckley, M. (2019). Physical education experiences of Alaskan youths with visual impairments: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 113(1), 57-67.
- Haegele, J. A., & Zhu, X. (2017). Experiences of individuals with visual impairments in integrated physical education: A retrospective study. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 88(4), 425-435.
- Haegele, J. A., Yessick, A., & Zhu, X. (2018). Females with visual impairments in physical education: Exploring the intersection between disability and gender identities. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 89(3), 298-308.
- Haegele, J. A., Zhu, X., & Davis, S. (2017). The meaning of physical education and sport among elite athletes with visual impairments. *European Physical Education Review*, 23(4), 375-391.
- Haegele, J.A., & Porretta, D.L. (2015). Physical activity and school-aged individuals with visual impairments: A literature review. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 32(1), 68-82.  
doi:10.1123/apaq.2013-0110
- Haegele, J.A., & Sutherland, S. (2015). Perspectives of students with disabilities toward physical education: A qualitative inquiry review. *Quest*, 67(3), 255-273.  
doi:10.1080/00336297.2015.1050118
- Kirk, D. (2003). Student learning and the social construction of gender in sport and physical education. In S. J. Silverman & C. D. Ennis (Eds.), *Student learning in physical*

- education: Applying research to enhance instruction*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Marsh, H. W., Hey, J., Roche, L. A., & Perry, C. (1997). Structure of physical self-concept: Elite athletes and physical education students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(2), 369.
- Moodley, J., & Graham, L. (2015). The importance of intersectionality in disability and gender studies. *Agenda*, 29(2), 24-33.
- Pensgaard, A. M., & Sorensen, M. (2002). Empowerment through the sport context: A model to guide research for individuals with disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 19(1), 48-67.
- Petty, N. J., Thomson, O. P., & Stew, G. (2012). Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 2: Introducing qualitative research methodologies and methods. *Manual therapy*, 17(5), 378-384.
- Ponchillia, P. E., Armbruster, J., & Wiebold, J. (2005). The national sports education camps project: Introducing sports skills to students with visual impairments through short-term specialized instruction. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 99(11), 685-695.
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A.C. (2017). Interviews. In B. Smith and A.C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Smith, J. A. (Ed.). (2015). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Spencer-Cavaliere, N., & Watkinson, E.J. (2010). Inclusion understood from the perspectives of children with disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 27(4), 275-293.
- Warburton, D. E., Nicol, C. W., & Bredin, S. S. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: The evidence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 174(6), 801-809.



- Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health, 15*, 215-228.
- Yessick, A., & Haegele, J. A. (2019). "Missed opportunities": Adults with visual impairments' reflections on the impact of physical education on current physical activity. *British Journal of Visual Impairment, 37*(1), 40-49.

## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to take an intersectional approach to understand how identifying as an individual with a visual impairment, a female, and an athlete intersected to influence physical education and sport experiences. In previous years, the perspective of those with disabilities about their personal experiences in physical education has become vital to this area of research (Byrnes & Rickards, 2011), and has provided them with a voice to express their thoughts, feelings, and frustrations about their personal experiences in physical education classes (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkins, 2010). It is understood that females and those with disabilities experience hardships in physical education. However, little research has been conducted about the obstacles athletes with a visual impairment face and how those obstacles intersect with challenges related to identifying as a female, in a physical education or sport setting.

The target population for this study were female, current or previous elite level athletes who have a visual impairment. The participants were interviewed over telephone/video calls utilizing a semi-structured interview guide to gain insight into the obstacles they faced. Two interrelated themes constructed from the data were, physical education was ‘just a credit’ and ‘If you enjoy this, we will drive you’.

The first theme, physical education was ‘just a credit’, was congruent with existing research that noted, while positive experiences were available, negative physical education experiences were more commonly described by individuals with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, during physical education (Fitzgerald, 2005; Haegele & Zhu, 2017). The power of teacher-student relationships and how they influenced the student’s attitudes and opinions of physical education was strongly demonstrated throughout this theme (Haegele & Buckley, 2019; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015; Haegele, Zhu & Davis, 2017) through negative

experiences. For example, Barb expressed that “my teachers didn’t really strive to make sure I did great or learned” and that “I ended up feeling so awkward and uncomfortable and I was miserable because then I was watching everyone.” Interestingly, while prior research has demonstrated that those with visual impairments who have poor physical education experiences tend to disengage from physical activity outside of school (Yessick & Haegele, 2019), this action was not the case for these participants. For example, Alison recalled that “Physical education wasn’t the only space where I could be active. And so, I guess in that sense, I was really lucky because P.E. wasn’t too influential, and so even in times when I was excluded from activities, it didn’t deter me from continuing to be athletic outside of school.” Rather, outside of school activities appeared to supersede school-based physical education, and participants were not discouraged in developing their identities as athletes because of these poor experiences.

The second theme, ‘If you enjoy this, we will drive you’, exposed the influential effects short-term sport education camps and parental support had on the participants. The introduction to adaptive sports occurred for most participants at these short-term sport education camps and started their journey to the elite level. For example, Sam shared that “I think my competitive drive started a sports camp”, and Barb recalled that “I went to a sports camp for the first time and I was 14, and I came home and I was telling my parents, ‘I tried the sport. it’s called goalball, I love it, it’s great.’” Similar to the positive impact of the camps, the constant support and dedication the participants received from their parents contributed to their current status as elite athletes. For example, after Patty discovered goalball at the sport education camp, she recalled their response, “My parents said, ‘Okay, if you enjoy this, we will drive you an hour to practice every weekend.’” This theme further exemplified the importance of outside of school physical activities, as well as the support of parents to facilitate those activities and to help develop

athletic identities among those with visual impairments.

### **Limitations**

There were two main limitations in this study. First, the retrospective nature of the study may limit the participant's ability to recall detailed particularities of their experiences associated with some questions. Second, utilizing phone interviews may dilute the intimacy of the interview along with the ability of the interviewer to observe body language or facial expressions.

### **Conclusions**

Using an IPA approach, two themes emerged from this study. The first theme, physical education was 'just a credit' showcased negative aspects associated with the participants' physical education experiences, and the role that student-teacher relationships played in shaping those experiences. The second theme, 'if you enjoy this, we will drive you', depicted the profound meaning that activities outside of physical education had for participants, and the role that families played in facilitating these experiences. This study took an explicitly intersectional approach, to attempt to understand how identifying as a female, an athlete, and an individual with a visual impairment influenced their experiences in physical education and sport. Interestingly, clear depictions of how having a visual impairment and being an athlete influenced physical education and sport activities were present and consistent with the extant literature (Haegele & Zhu, 2017; Haegele et al., 2017). For example, participants recalled similar experiences of marginalization, such as feelings about receiving a lack of support from teachers (Haegele, 2019), ubiquitous to research in this area of inquiry related to visual impairment identities. Interestingly though, few reflections described by the participants centered on the influence of identifying as a female in physical education, and notes about gendered inequities in physical education (Brown & Evans, 2004) were largely absent. These findings may suggest that

identities associated with disability and athletic may have superseded those associated with gender, acting as a more powerful influence on their reflections on physical education. Future research should continue to examine the influence of various identities on experiences in physical education, to help identify how best to provide meaningful experiences for people who may be otherwise marginalized in this educational context.

## REFERENCES

- Adler, P. A., Kless, S. J., & Adler, P. (1992). Socialization to gender roles: Popularity among elementary school boys and girls. *Sociology of Education*, 14, 19-39.
- Azzarito, L. (2009). The panopticon of physical education: Pretty, active and ideally white. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 14, 19–39.
- Azzarito, L., & Solomon, M. A. (2005). A reconceptualization of physical education: The intersection of gender/race/social class. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10(1), 25-47.
- Bramham, P. (2003). Boys, masculinities and PE. *Sport, Education and Society*, 8(1), 57-71.
- Brown, D., & Evans, J. (2004). Reproducing gender? Intergenerational links and the male PE teacher as a cultural conduit in teaching physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 23(1), 48-70.
- Byrnes, L. J., & Rickards, F. W. (2011). Listening to the voices of students with disabilities: Can such voices inform practice? *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 25-34.
- Combahee River Collective. (1977). *The Combahee River Collective Statement*. Available at: <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>. Accessed April 15th, 2020
- Constantinou, P., Manson, M., & Silverman, S. (2009). Female students' perceptions about gender-role stereotypes and their influence on attitude toward physical education. *Physical Educator*, 66(2), 85-96.
- Cuthbert, K. (2017). You have to be normal to be abnormal: An empirically grounded exploration of the intersection of asexuality and disability. *Sociology*, 51(2), 241-257.
- Dagkas, S. (2016). Problematizing social justice in health pedagogy and youth sport: Intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and class. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 87(3), 221-229.

- Dagkas, S., Benn, T., & Jawad, H. (2011). Multiple voices: Improving participation of Muslim girls in physical education and school sport. *Sport, Education and Society*, 16(2), 223-239.
- Daley, A. J., & Buchanan, J. (1999). Aerobic dance and physical self-perceptions in female adolescents: Some implications for physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 70(2), 196-200.
- Fitzgerald, H. (2005). Still feeling like a spare piece of luggage? Embodied experiences of (dis)ability in physical education and school sport. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 10(1), 41-59. doi:10.1080/1740898042000334908
- Gabbett, T., Jenkins, D., & Abernethy, B. (2009). Game-based training for improving skill and physical fitness in team sport athletes. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(2), 273-283.
- Haegele, J. A., & Buckley, M. (2019). Physical education experiences of Alaskan youths with visual impairments: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 113(1), 57-67.
- Haegele, J. A., & Kirk, T. N. (2018). Experiences in physical education: Exploring the intersection of visual impairment and maleness. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 35(2), 196-213.
- Haegele, J. A., & Zhu, X. (2017). Experiences of individuals with visual impairments in integrated physical education: A retrospective study. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 88(4), 425-435.
- Haegele, J. A., Yessick, A., & Zhu, X. (2018). Females with visual impairments in physical education: Exploring the intersection between disability and gender identities. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 89(3), 298-308.

- Haegele, J. A., Zhu, X., & Davis, S. (2017). The meaning of physical education and sport among elite athletes with visual impairments. *European Physical Education Review*, 23(4), 375-391.
- Haegele, J. A., Zhu, X., & Holland, K. (2019). Exploring the intersection between disability and overweightness in physical education among females with visual impairments. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 90(3), 344-354
- Haegele, J.A., & Porretta, D.L. (2015). Physical activity and school-aged individuals with visual impairments: A literature review. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 32(1), 68-82.  
doi:10.1123/apaq.2013-0110
- Haegele, J.A., & Sutherland, S. (2015). Perspectives of students with disabilities toward physical education: A qualitative inquiry review. *Quest*, 67(3), 255-273.  
doi:10.1080/00336297.2015.1050118
- Hills, L. (2007). Friendship, physicality, and physical education: An exploration of the social and embodied dynamics of girls' physical education experiences. *Sport, Education and Society*, 12(3), 317-336.
- Kirk, D. (2003). Student learning and the social construction of gender in sport and physical education. In S. J. Silverman & C. D. Ennis (Eds.), *Student learning in physical education: Applying research to enhance instruction*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kozub, F. M., & Oh, H. (2004). An exploratory study of physical activity levels in children and adolescents with visual impairments. *Clinical Kinesiology*, 58(3), 1-7.
- Lieberman, L. J., & McHugh, E. (2001). Health-related fitness of children who are visually impaired. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 95(5), 272-287.



- Marsh, H. W., Hey, J., Roche, L. A., & Perry, C. (1997). Structure of physical self-concept: Elite athletes and physical education students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(2), 369.
- Mirza, H. S. (2008). *Race, gender and educational desire: Why black women succeed and fail*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Moodley, J., & Graham, L. (2015). The importance of intersectionality in disability and gender studies. *Agenda*, 29(2), 24-33.
- Oliver, K. L., Hamzeh, M., & McCaughtry, N. (2009). Girly girls can play games: Co-creating a curriculum of possibilities with fifth-grade girls. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 28(1), 90-110.
- Pensgaard, A. M., & Sorensen, M. (2002). Empowerment through the sport context: A model to guide research for individuals with disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 19(1), 48-67.
- Petty, N. J., Thomson, O. P., & Stew, G. (2012). Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 2: Introducing qualitative research methodologies and methods. *Manual therapy*, 17(5), 378-384.
- Ponchillia, P. E., Armbruster, J., & Wiebold, J. (2005). The national sports education camps project: Introducing sports skills to students with visual impairments through short-term specialized instruction. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 99(11), 685-695.
- Smith, B., & Sparkes, A.C. (2017). Interviews. In B. Smith and A.C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Smith, J. A. (Ed.). (2015). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain. *British Journal of Pain*, 9(1), 41-42.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Spencer-Cavaliere, N., & Watkinson, E.J. (2010). Inclusion understood from the perspectives of children with disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 27(4), 275-293.
- Warburton, D. E., Nicol, C. W., & Bredin, S. S. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: The evidence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 174(6), 801-809.
- Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health*, 15, 215-228.
- Yessick, A., & Haegele, J. A. (2019). “Missed opportunities”: Adults with visual impairments’ reflections on the impact of physical education on current physical activity. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 37(1), 40-49.

## Appendix A INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Participant Interview Guide

#### **Demographic Information**

1. Age
2. VI level while in school
3. VI congenital or acquired?
4. Gender
5. Race/Ethnicity
6. Can you please describe your K-12 physical education placement?
  - a. Was it self-contained (e.g., adapted physical education classes)?
  - b. Was it inclusive (e.g., general physical education classes)?
  - c. Combination?
7. Can you describe other physical activities you took part in during K-12 (e.g., sports, camps, extracurricular activities)?

#### **Interview Questions**

8. Can you describe what your experiences in K-12 physical education were like?
  - a. What was the essence of your K-12 physical education experiences?
  - b. How meaningful was your participation in physical education?
9. Do you believe having a visual impairment influenced how you experienced physical education?
  - a. Can you describe how?
  - b. How did this make you feel at the time?
10. Can you describe what your experiences in sport/physical activity (other than PE) were like?

- a. What sports were offered in your community?
  - b. Did you feel like there was enough opportunity for you to actively participate?
11. Do you feel having a visual impairment influenced your experience in sports/physical activity?
- a. Can you describe how?
  - b. At the time, how did this make you feel?
12. Do you believe being a female influenced how you experienced physical education?
- a. Can you describe how?
  - b. How did this make you feel at the time?
13. Did you notice different behaviors or attitudes among those who were not females when participating in PE?
14. In general, do you feel like people who were females tended to participate in PE equally to other kids?
15. What kind of expectations were set out for you in PE (e.g. achievement, participation, fitness, etc.)? Were these expectations the same as other students?
- a. Did it seem like expectations were different for males in the class?
16. What kind of activities did you engage in in PE? Were these the same activities as everyone else?
- a. Did it seem like these activities were different for your peers?
17. Did being an athlete impact/influence your physical education experience in any way?
- a. Can you describe how?
  - b. Did it make you more confident during activities and want to participate?
18. Were the athletic females treated differently?

- a. Did they actively want to participate just as male athletes?
19. Do you believe that having a visual impairment was or less impactful than being a female on your physical education experiences? Or the opposite?
- a. How about being a female athlete?
20. Can you describe your experiences with your physical education teachers?
- a. Do you believe you had a meaningful relationship with your physical education teacher?
  - b. Do you believe that your visual impairment influenced your relationship with your physical education teacher?
  - c. Do you believe being a female influenced your relationship with your physical education teacher?
  - d. Do you believe being an athlete influences your relationship with your physical education teacher?
  - e. How did this relationship make you feel at the time?
21. Can you describe your experiences with your sport coaches?
- a. Do you believe you had a meaningful relationship with your coach?
  - b. Do you believe that your visual impairment influenced your relationship with your coach?
  - c. Do you believe being a female influenced your relationship with your coach?
  - d. Do you believe being an athlete influences your relationship with your coach?
  - e. How did this relationship make you feel at the time?
22. Can you describe your experiences with your peers during physical education?

- a. Do you believe you had a meaningful relationship with your peers in physical education? Male peers? Female peers? Peers without disabilities? With disabilities?
  - b. Do you believe your visual impairment influenced your relationship with your peers during physical education?
  - c. Do you believe being a female influenced your relationship with your peers during physical education?
  - d. Do you believe being an athlete influenced your relationship with your peers during physical education?
  - e. How did this make you feel at the time?
23. Did you ever experience any sort of bullying or teasing?
- a. Do you think this had to do with being a female athlete?
  - b. Do you think this had to do with having a visual impairment?
24. Did you experience any pressure from your physical education teacher to be good or bad at activities?
- a. Do you think this had to do with being a female athlete?
  - b. Do you think this had to do with having a visual impairment?
25. How have your K-12 physical education experiences influenced your understanding about your capabilities?
26. Can you describe how your K-12 physical education experiences impacted your current physical activity participation?
- a. How do you feel about this?

- b. What could have been different that could have had a better impact on your current physical activity?
- 27. Do you remember a particularly meaningful experience you had while in physical education or physical activity (describe)?
- 28. Do you remember a particularly challenging experience you had while in physical education or physical activity (describe)?
- 29. **Can you circle back, and talk about how visual impairment, and being a female athlete influenced PE for you?**
- 30. Is there anything else you would like to describe about being a female athlete in physical education?
- 31. Is there anything else you would like to describe about having a visual impairment in physical education?

## Appendix B



## OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

**Physical Address**

4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203  
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

**Mailing Address**

Office of Research  
1 Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, Virginia 23529  
Phone(757) 683-3460  
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE: November 22, 2019

TO: Justin Haegele

FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [1526600-1] EXPERIENCES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT:  
INVESTIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTIFYING AS A FEMALE,  
AN ATHLETE, AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: November 22, 2019

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Laura Chezan at (757) 683-7055 or lchezan@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.



## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

Maggi Buckley  
[Mbuck011@odu.edu](mailto:Mbuck011@odu.edu)

### **ADDRESS**

430 Delaware Ave  
 APT 110  
 Norfolk, VA 23508  
 301-957-4892

### **EDUCATION**

Master of Science in Physical Education Pending 2020  
 Concentration: Adapted Physical Education  
 Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

Bachelor of Science in Physical Education May 2017  
 Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

### **RECENT EMPLOYMENT**

**ASSISTANT WOMEN'S LACROSSE COACH** May 2018-Present  
 Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

- Assisted in planning practices
- Defensive and Goalie coordinator
- Planned and coordinated all travel

**CAMP DIRECETOR** July 2018

Camp Abilities, Anchorage, AK

- Organized and coordinated the sports camp for blind and visually impaired athletes – with over eight sports included
- Educated volunteers on how to assist children who are blind or visually impaired during physical activities

**VOLUNTEER WORK** July 2017

Camp Abilities, Anchorage, AK

- Assisted athletes who were blind or visually impaired at a sports camp
- Assisted athletes to become more independent and advocate for themselves during every day activities

### **CERTIFICATIONS**

- American Red Cross CPR/AED

### **PROFESIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

- US Lacrosse member