

COLLEGE WHEELCHAIR ATHLETES' REFLECTIONS ON THEIR
PHYSICAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the reflections of 10 college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities on their prior physical education experiences in elementary, middle, and high school. Using qualitative techniques, each participant was interviewed individually twice and then two separate focus group interviews were held. Each participant brought an artifact with them to their assigned focus group interview that represented their prior physical education experiences. Both the individual and focus group interviews were designed to establish how these college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities reflect back on their prior physical education experiences. Using analytic induction, the data analysis revealed five themes: (a) the participants felt they were included in physical education, but not really equally and meaningfully; (b) physical fitness testing was the most remembered physical education experience; (c) the participants' sporting experiences were recognized by the school; (d) overall, the participants' physical education experiences were enjoyable; and (e) the participants have suggestions for physical educators on including individuals with disabilities in physical education. Also, within four of these overall themes, several sub-themes emerged. Although this study was limited to the reflections of these 10 college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities on their prior physical education experiences, the themes found in this study provide a basis for future studies on how individuals with physical disabilities experience physical education.

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CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The meaning of physical education has evolved and changed much since the ancient and modern Olympics. Over time, the physical education discipline has incorporated concepts from various arenas such as physical exercise and training, physical activity, and competitive sport. Even with its long history, physical education continues to evolve as physical educators improve their instructional practices, medical professionals discover better ways for individuals to exercise and be healthy, and as technological advances continue and offer new and improved ways to train the body for all types of physical activity (Patterson, 2004). Knowing the background and meaning of physical education allows educators to understand why both instructional practices and curriculums continue to evolve and will continue to change in order to provide students the knowledge and tools for a lifetime of health and wellness.

Physical education is “the school curriculum that leads participants to remaining physically active for a lifetime” (Graham, Holt/Hale & Parker, 2007, p. 4). The purpose of a quality physical education program is to guide students in the process of becoming physically active for their entire lifetime. This definition of physical education is straightforward, but does current physical education guide all students, including students with disabilities, to lifetime physical activity? Is modern physical education inclusive? Are students with disabilities in general physical education settings being offered the same opportunities as students without disabilities on becoming physically active for a lifetime?

The inclusion of students with disabilities into physical education classes is something that most physical education teachers will encounter in their careers (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000) and physical educators are using the term “inclusion” with increasing frequency (Block, 1994; Block & Vogler, 1994; DePauw, 1986; DePauw & Goc Karp, 1990, 1994; Rizzo, Davis & Toussaint, 1994; Roper, 1991). Similar to the term “mainstreaming,” inclusion is often used and misused to describe any effort at placing students with disabilities into general education, regardless of the quality of services being provided within the placement (Block, 1994). Simply put, inclusion refers to providing students with disabilities specially designed instruction within regular education environments (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991).

In specific relation to physical education, inclusion is adapted physical education provided to students with disabilities within the general physical education setting (Block, 1994). The terminology and definitions in the field of physical education have changed in recent years. Adapted physical education should be viewed as a “service or process, rather than a place, placement or program” (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p. 136). Successful inclusion requires students’ with disabilities to have informed choices (DePauw, 1997).

It is important to note that the physical education environment and curricula should be designed to meet the needs of all students regardless of ability (Sherrill, 1993). Participation in physical education is important in developing life skills and motor proficiency for students with disabilities (Auxter, Pyfer & Huetting, 1997; Gallahue, 1996; Sherrill, 1993) and many researchers believe this can be effectively achieved by including students with disabilities in the general physical education setting (Auxter et al.; Gallahue). Poor physical education programs should be identified and changed; they should not be used as an excuse for excluding students with disabilities. Good physical education should be individualized for all students. If general

physical education programs do not accommodate individual differences, then support should be provided to change these programs. Changes can benefit all students, not just the students with disabilities (Block, 1994).

Research indicates when thoughtfully planned and implemented, inclusion of students with disabilities can be a beneficial experience for students both with and without disabilities (Eichstaedt & Lavay, 1992; Snell & Eichner, 1989; Stainback & Stainback, 1990). On the other hand, when inclusion is haphazardly planned and students are “dumped” into general physical education without support, it can become a negative experience for students with and without disabilities (Grosse, 1991; Lavay & DePaepe, 1987; Morreau & Eichstaedt, 1983). Many researchers believe an inclusive setting may contribute to enhanced self-esteem for children with disabilities and increased social acceptance from their peers without disabilities (Block & Malloy, 1998; Helmstetter, Peck & Giangreco, 1994; Wilhite, Mushett, Goldenburg & Trader, 1997).

In research on education, students have been written about from many perspectives, and for a plethora of purposes, but rarely have they been asked to speak for themselves (Davies, 1982). In order for educators to understand the impact their class may have had on students, the best people to ask would be the students themselves. In specific relation to physical education, why not ask athletes if their physical education experiences had any impact on their decision to play sports? One researcher, Timothy Church, did just that in a study to find out if high school stand-out athletes felt differently about physical education than non-athletes. He found that the stand-out athletes enjoyed physical education more than the non-athletes and the stand-out athletes also deemed physical education more useful than the non-athletes (Church, Poster

Presentation). While this is true for able-bodied athletes, what is the impact of physical education on wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities?

One way of finding out if wheelchair athletes feel the same way about their physical education experiences is to ask college wheelchair athletes to reflect on their physical education experiences. After all, student attitudes in physical education influence participation in physical activity and sport outside of physical education (Carlson, 1995; Ennis, 1996). Continuing on this idea, college wheelchair athletes have clearly chosen to continue physical activity and sport participation so it would be interesting to see if this continued participation relates back to their physical education experiences.

Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to examine students' perceptions of physical education combined with what we know about inclusion, to take it one step further and examine students' with disabilities perceptions on physical education, and then, finally, to provide a brief history of disability sport and sport opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It is hoped that by examining the perceptions of students with disabilities on physical education, physical educators will be convinced they have a responsibility to all students, and that each student, disabled or not, has the same right to participate in the most inclusive setting possible. The literature is reviewed in three sections. The first section is an overview of inclusive education and provides a background of legislation that mandates the inclusion of students with disabilities into education and more specifically physical education. The second section examines perceptions of physical education experiences among students with and without disabilities. Finally, the third section examines disability sport and the opportunities that are provided to individuals with physical disabilities. There is a lack of literature on how individuals with physical disabilities feel about their physical education experiences and how to begin sport

participation, so this section of the literature review will focus instead on what disability sport is and the opportunities available for disability sport participation.

Inclusive Education

The intent of this section is to review the history and evolution of inclusion in the United States. Inclusion is the practice of educating all students, regardless of ability or disability, in general education and general classes (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989). The overall purpose of inclusion is that all students are provided the opportunity to develop their skills and attitudes needed to learn, live, and work together in all aspects of society (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Inclusion does not mean “dumping” students with disabilities into the general education classroom without proper supports. It is important to understand that inclusion does not mean that all students with disabilities should be or are working toward the same goals and have the same needs. According to Block, inclusion means providing all students with appropriate educational programs geared toward their individual abilities and needs with supports provided to ensure their success (1994).

History of Inclusion

Special education began in the United States in the early 1800s when a state school in Kentucky was established for the deaf in 1823 (Hardin, 2005). Almost 30 years later, the state of Massachusetts enacted the United States’ first compulsory law, which explicitly permitted the exclusion of students with disabilities from required attendance (Ballard, Ramirez, & Weintraub, 1982). In Providence, Rhode Island in 1896 a separate class for students with mental retardation was established (Ballard et al.). By the early 1900s, New York City had set up its first nonresidential school for delinquent or “incurable” children (Myhill, 2008). The rationale for this was based on the belief that by removing these students from the general education setting, the

students who remained would benefit more from their educational experience. This educational thought continued throughout the early 1900s and students with disabilities were viewed as both physically and developmentally different from students without disabilities (Myhill). These differences launched the development of a separate educational model for students with disabilities in which they were provided special teachers who had special training and used alternate materials, equipment, and teaching strategies. This resulted in a dual system of education with general education on one side and special education on the other (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989).

In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* was a landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court that declared that having separate schools for different races and not providing equal educational opportunities was unconstitutional (Heward, 2006). Due to *Brown v. Board of Education*, separate schools for African-American students were closed and the integration of public schools began. This landmark decision not only ended segregation by race in the public school system, but also provided an opportunity for parents of children with disabilities to notice in the integration and begin to advocate for their children to be integrated into the public school system as well. Slowly, students with disabilities were integrated into general schools and placed in special education classes (Hardin, 2005). Often, one school within a school district or area became the primary facility where all children with disabilities were sent to be educated (Hardin). Special education teachers were viewed differently from general education teachers due to their specific training to work with students with disabilities which often meant the general education and special education teachers would not interact with each other (Perkinson, 1995).

In the 1970s, the idea was presented of including students with disabilities in general classrooms in their local schools. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 was passed in response to concerns of parents and educators over the exclusion of children with disabilities from school and the lack of support services for those children (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991). Formerly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142 became a landmark piece of legislation that completely changed the face of education in the United States (Heward, 2006). Public Law 94-142 advocated that children with disabilities receive a free and public education, an Individualized Education Program (IEP), be educated in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE), and receive Physical Education as a direct, educational service (Heward). The LRE was defined by lawmakers as

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public and private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children without disabilities, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from regular educational environments occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved (*Federal Register*, August, 1977, p. 42497).

The LRE for students with disabilities is one that places them in the same environment with students without disabilities, whenever possible, to receive their education. This passage also indicates that in order to appropriately place children with disabilities into the general education classroom there is a possibility that supplementary aids, supports, and services may be required. Without the proper support, the student may not be successful in the general education classroom (Block & Krebs, 1992).

In the 1980s, the notion of full inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classrooms began to expand. In 1986, Madeleine Will, then the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education in the United States Department of Education called for a “regular education initiative” (REI) (Hardin, 2005). While she praised the accomplishments of

special education in the decade since the enactment of PL 94-142, she also went on to criticize current pull-out programs and then suggested several changes that should be made to the separate system (Block, 1994). The suggested changes were designed to serve students with disabilities appropriately in regular education (Will, 1986).

Since PL 94-142 became a law in 1975, Congress has reauthorized and amended it five times (Heward, 2006). The 1990 amendments renamed the law from the Education Act for All Handicapped Children Act to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA has had an effect on every school in the United States and has “changed the roles of regular and special educators, school administrators, parents, and students with disabilities in the educational process” (Heward, 2006, p. 19). Successful inclusive schools now exist throughout the United States. Instead of having a separate system for special education and general education, these inclusive schools operate together under one educational system (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Students with disabilities attend their local community schools and are full members of the general education classrooms where they are provided educational opportunities geared to meet their abilities and needs. Within these inclusive classrooms, support services are provided in order to ensure the students with disabilities have what they need to reach their full potential (Stainback & Stainback).

While that is the ideal of inclusion, the evolution of inclusive education continues to cause a demographic change in modern day classrooms in the United States. *The 26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* revealed that there were approximately 6.4 million school children with disabilities during the 2001-2002 school year, nearly 15% of the student population. In 2002, 96% of students with disabilities were educated in regular school buildings; however, the time they spent in regular

classrooms varied. Almost half of all students with disabilities (48.2%) were educated for most of their school day in the regular classroom; that is, they were outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day. This number has risen almost 5% from 1993 when 43.4% of students with disabilities spent most of their school day in the regular classroom. This rising trend is predicted to continue making it all the more important for teachers, not just special educators, to be prepared to teach students with disabilities.

Inclusive Physical Education

Inclusion, simply put, refers to providing specially designed instruction to students with disabilities within general education environments, including support services as needed (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991). In specific reference to physical education, inclusion is adapted physical education provided within the general physical education classroom. In the 1970s, the term “adapted physical activity” was introduced by the founders of the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA). It was introduced to acknowledge that the concept of adapted physical education not be limited to the school setting and adapted physical education programs, but also be expanded to encompass instructional practices to aid in lifetime fitness awareness for students with disabilities (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000). Sherrill proposed a broader definition where adapted physical education became a place where instructional strategies were used in a variety of environments versus having a separate program for individuals with disabilities (1976). The terminology and definitions in the physical education field have changed in the ever evolving underlying philosophy of adapted physical activity and disability sport. Adapted physical education should be viewed as a service rather than a placement or even a program (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000).

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), was created to prohibit the discrimination of individuals with disabilities in the public and private sectors (Tysse, 1991). The ADA outlaws discrimination against a person with a disability in these five areas: employment, public services, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications (Tysse). The ADA requires accessibility in federal and private sectors, including physical education facilities (Tysse). For example, weight rooms should accommodate wheelchair users, gym lockers should have key locks instead of combination locks if necessary, and gyms with stairs should also have ramps.

In physical education, all students have unique educational objectives and different levels of physical education competency. Inclusion is about embracing all students and making a commitment to do whatever it takes to create equal and meaningful opportunities for student learning. While the words equally and meaningfully can be used together, unfortunately, the two are often not synonymous.

It is important to understand how physical educators may provide equal, but not meaningful opportunities and vice versa. For example, if a female student who uses a wheelchair is included to play a game of kickball with the rest of her class she is being equally included. However, if she is not getting to kick the ball or has to have a classmate run for her, then most likely the kickball game is not meaningful to her. An example of the reverse situation could be a male student who uses a walker, due to a lack of coordination and balance because of his disability, is going to stay inside with an aide to work on his balance while the rest of the class goes outside to play a game. In this situation, the student would not be included equally because he has been left inside to work with an aide while the rest of the class goes outside. However,

because this student needs to work on his balance this activity may be more meaningful to him than if he was outside and participating with the rest of his class.

Individual differences should not be ridiculed, but rather shared among students where they can learn to respect each other's unique abilities. Successful inclusion in physical education requires that individuals with disabilities have choices and are allowed to make decisions (DePauw, 1997). These decisions and choices can only be made if the students with disabilities are given the supports they need such as adapted equipment, specialized instruction, and trained personnel. In order to create a successful inclusive environment in physical education, general physical educators must work collaboratively with parents, therapists, and possibly adapted physical education specialist to aid in providing the most appropriate and meaningful program to all students (Sherrill, 1993). Teaching practices that exclude any student from active participation in a safe and meaningful way in physical education should be replaced with a curriculum grounded in a diverse learning environment, where all students have the opportunity to set and reach personal goals (Dunn & Fait, 1989).

The main difference between adapted physical education and general physical education is that adjustments or adaptations are made to the planned activities to ensure that students with disabilities are provided the opportunity for safe, successful, and beneficial participation (Block, 1994). Most of these adaptations such as providing alternative activities or modifying equipment or rules to a game can be done with very little disruption in the physical education classroom. However, inclusion cannot be accomplished solely through these small changes (Rizzo & Lavay, 2000). It requires the use of techniques and strategies based on new assumptions (Lieberman, James, & Ludwa, 2004), in addition to the application of more traditional approaches. Most importantly, inclusion in physical education strives to honor all kinds of student diversity (not

just disability) as an opportunity for learning about how everyone can become physically active for a lifetime through a variety of movement and fitness activities (Webb & Pope, 1999).

Perceptions on Physical Education Experiences

Although legislation mandates that students with disabilities be educated in their least restricted environments, is this really taking place in physical education? In order to understand if students with disabilities are being provided the same opportunities as students without disabilities it is necessary to examine the perceptions of both students with and without disabilities on their physical education experiences.

Students' Perceptions on Physical Education

In recent years, researchers have grown increasingly interested in students' perceptions and feelings about what they learn and where they learn. Students' perceptions and feelings often contribute to a student's attitude in relation to specific subjects being taught, specific teachers, and toward specific school experiences (Martin, 2002). By studying students' perceptions, researchers can potentially gain a vast amount of knowledge that will in turn provide valuable insights into understanding how students perceive or give meaning to instructional experiences (Solmon & Carter, 1995) and, more specifically, the meaning they give to instructional experiences in physical education.

Children and adolescents are obviously going to interpret the world and their experiences in that world differently from adults (Sanders, 1996). For example, a study done by Lawson, Lawson and Stevens (1982) found, after interviewing nearly 300 participants, that the messages the physical educators were trying to get across about the basic meaning of physical education were slightly blurred with the meaning of recess in the eyes of the students.

Understanding how students think, feel, and learn about particular subjects allows teachers an opportunity to make changes in their teaching strategies and curricula in order to educate a variety of students effectively (Erickson & Shultz, 1992; Sanders, 1996). Hammersley and Woods (1984) summarized the importance of gaining students' insights about school by saying,

There can be little doubt that pupils' own interpretations of school processes represent a crucial link in the educational chain. Unless we understand how pupils respond to different forms of pedagogy and school organization and why they respond in the ways that they do, our efforts to increase the effectiveness, or to change the impact, of schooling will stand little chance of success (p. 3).

In addition to studies providing insights about how students view classroom subjects, the need and importance of talking to students in physical education to gain insights into their perceptions has also been recognized (Graham, 1995a, 1995b, Hopple & Graham, 1995; Smith, 1991; Solmon & Carter, 1995).

Graham (1995a) published a monograph to provide scholars and practitioners with valuable information about students' experiences in physical education. Throughout the nine articles, students of all ages were asked about their experiences in physical education classes. For example, Sanders and Graham did a study to gain insight into kindergartners' initial experiences in physical education (1995). Lee, Carter, and Xiang studied children's views of competence in physical activity (1995). Dyson's study looked at student perceptions of a physical education program which emphasized a Project Adventure curriculum (1995). Another study in the monograph that was done by Hopple and Graham studied students' views and understandings of physical fitness testing (1995). Nugent and Faucette's study compared the insights of a learning-disabled child and a gifted child about physical education grading procedures (1995). In Veal and Compagnone's study they talked with students to determine if the use of formative

assessment had any effect on self-perceptions of effort and skill (1995). Portman's study gained an understanding of what physical education is like for low-skilled sixth graders (1995). Walling and Martinek determined the level of learned helplessness related to physical education by interviewing sixth graders (1995). The last study in the monograph was done by Carlson, who interviewed middle and high school students to gain insight into why adolescents feel alienated in physical education classes (1995).

Although previous research indicated that, overall, students' perceptions and feelings about physical education have been positive (Butcher, 1982; Coe, 1984; Rice, 1988; Scott & West, 1990; Solmon & Carter, 1995; Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1993), more recent literature suggests that students of different ability levels often have different experiences and feelings about and toward physical education (Carlson, 1995; Nugent & Faucette, 1995; Silverman, 1999; Silverman, Woods, & Subramaniam, 1999). For example, low-skilled students sometimes tend to view physical education as a place where isolation and humiliation are common, with opportunities for success uncommon (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000).

Graham (1995a) suggested that the physical education class should not be a "one size fits all" environment. Students of different skill levels may have different perceptions and feelings and it would greatly benefit physical educators to understand them. Student perceptions help remind us as physical educators that what we teach and how we teach can have a significant impact on the students in our classes and their future perceptions of their physical education experiences (Bowyer, 1996). The opportunity for students to participate meaningfully and competently contributes to positive experiences in physical education (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000).

Students' with Disabilities Perceptions on Physical Education

Hearing the perceptions of students' with disabilities can "inform our understandings of, and collaborations with, persons with a disability as well as their needs, interests and desires for attaining active, healthy lifestyles" (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p. 141). In the past, the goals and objectives for students with disabilities in physical education have been wide open for interpretation (Davis, 1989; Sherrill & Montelione, 1990) and the degree to which program content is relevant and ecologically valid for students with physical disabilities is unclear (Davis & Burton, 1991). Inclusive physical education requires teachers to view and embrace student diversity as an expected and valued attribute (Bunker, 1994).

There has been little research on the physical education experiences of students with disabilities (Blinde & McCallister, 1989). In fact, most of the research examining disability-related issues in physical education has been from the perspective of the physical education teachers (Block, 1996; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1992; Vogler, van der Mars, Cusimano, & Darst, 1992). This research typically emphasized legislative guidelines, teaching strategies, and issues related to including students with disabilities into the general physical education setting (French, Keele, & Silliman-French, 1997; Kasser, Collier, & Solava, 1997; Kelly, 1994; Sherrill, Heikinaro-Johansson, & Slininger, 1994). Although several studies have focused on student outcomes in inclusive physical education settings (Fediuk, 1990; Heenan, 1994), missing in much of the work is the students' viewpoint and students with disabilities perceptions and experiences are rarely highlighted (Blinde & McCallister, 1989).

Blinde and McCallister (1998) found that students with disabilities typically viewed their physical education experiences in one of two ways: (a) they had limited participation or (b) they had negative emotional responses. Out of the 20 participants, only 1 participated regularly in her

physical education class. One of the participants was totally excluded from his physical education class because the teacher thought he was a liability.

As previously stated, children and adolescents interpret their experiences differently from adults (Sanders, 1996). Thus, listening to the voices of students with disabilities concerning their experiences in physical education could almost certainly provide a unique insight into the dynamics of the inclusive physical education setting. Gaining this knowledge from the students' perspectives can only help maximize student development and assist teachers in preparing appropriate curricular activities (Blinde & McCallister, 1989; Sanders).

The voices of students with disabilities afford a unique vantage point from which to view the physical education environment provided for students with disabilities in our schools today. Although students may not always have a clear or realistic understanding of the dynamics that affect their participation in physical education, these students nevertheless must live the outcomes of their experiences. The students' comments could offer valuable insight into how they perceive the physical education environment (Blinde & McCallister, 1989).

Including the voice of students with disabilities in our research agenda will deepen our understanding of disability and assist us in identifying barriers within physical education that are most meaningful to these students (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Reid, 1989). It is important to mention that through participation in physical education and sports, young people may achieve structured physical activity that may eventually lead to health-enhancing effects (Zahariadis & Biddle, 2000). In addition, school systems and physical educators tend to view sports as a good thing (Biddle, Sallis, & Cavill, 1998). There is little research indicating that participation in sport is the same for individuals with and without disabilities; therefore the next section of this

literature review is intended to provide an overview of disability sport and sport opportunities provided to individuals with disabilities.

Disability Sport Opportunities

The intent of this section is to provide a brief history of disability sport and to discuss sporting opportunities available to individuals with disabilities. Disability sports are played by persons with either a physical disability, intellectual disability, or a combination of both. Disability sport refers to sport modified or created to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities (Winnick, 2000). As many of these sports are modified able-bodied sports they are often referred to as adapted sports. However, not all disability sports are adapted; several sports that have been specifically created for individuals with disabilities have no equivalent in able-bodied sports. One example of this is goal ball. According to the USA Goalball website, goalball is a highly competitive sport played three-against-three, indoors on a gym floor--primarily by blind and visually impaired athletes (USA Goalball, 2010).

While sport has value in everyone's life, it is even more important in the life of a person with a disability (Stein & Paciorek, 1994). This is because of the rehabilitative influence sport can have on the physical body, as well as rehabilitating people with a disability into society (Stein & Paciorek). Furthermore, many advocates believe that participation in physical education and sport can lead to higher self-esteem in students with disabilities as well as increase the level of social acceptance among their non-disabled peers (Block & Malloy, 1998; Helmstetter et al., 1994; Wilhite et al., 1997).

According to Wenner (1989), "people play sports because they are enjoyable, satisfying, and fulfilling on a very existential level" (p.21). Individuals with disabilities participate in sport for a number of reasons, just the same as individuals without disabilities. One of these reasons is

to become more physically fit through an active lifestyle, to attain and maintain high levels of personal health, enhance quality of daily living, and to promote a healthy leisure lifestyle (Stein & Paciorek, 1994). Many individuals with physical disabilities participate in high performance competitive and recreational sports such as alpine skiing, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, power lifting, wheelchair tennis, volleyball, and swimming.

As stated by Winnick (2000), “as legislation on behalf of individuals with disabilities has led to more inclusion in all aspects of daily living, there has been an explosion in the number of organizations providing sports programming for persons with disabilities” (p. 36). The number of individuals with disabilities involved in sport and physical recreation is steadily increasing and organized sport for athletes with a disability is generally divided into three broad disability groups: the deaf, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and individuals with physical disabilities (Legg & Steadward, 2002). Each group has a distinct history, organization, competition program and approach to sport (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). The focus in this paper will be on sport for individuals with intellectual disabilities and sport for individuals with physical disabilities.

Sporting Opportunities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Sport for individuals with intellectual disabilities began to be organized in the 1960s through the Special Olympics movement. This grew out of a series of summer camps organized by Eunice Kennedy Shriver beginning in 1962. According to the Special Olympics home website, she began a summer day camp for children and adults with intellectual disabilities at her home in Maryland to “explore their capabilities in a variety of sports and physical activities” (Special Olympics, 2010). In 1968, the first international Special Olympics were held in

Chicago, Illinois where 1,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities came from 26 states and Canada to compete in track and field and swimming.

A person is eligible to participate in Special Olympics if they have been identified by an agency or professional as having intellectual disabilities as determined by their localities. The minimum age requirement for participation in Special Olympics competition is 8 years. Today, Special Olympics provides training and competition in a variety of sports for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Due to the wide range of intellectual disabilities and varied athletic abilities, the Special Olympics provides a variety of competition programs such as “motor activities for athletes with the severest limitations, team and individual sports skills, modified competition, and regulation competition in most sports” (Winnick, 2000, p. 125). In some events, the athletes require assistance to be able to participate, while in others the athletes may be able to compete individually or unassisted. Although there are other opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate in sport, the Special Olympics are by far the most widely known and recognized organization.

Sporting Opportunities for Individuals with Physical Disabilities

Organized sport for individuals with physical disabilities developed out of rehabilitation programs. Following World War II, sport was introduced as a key part of rehabilitation in response to the needs of large numbers of injured servicemen. Sport for rehabilitation grew into recreational sport and then into competitive sport. Currently, in the United States there are multiple organizations that provide opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities such as Disabled Sports USA (DS/USA), Dwarf Athletics Association of America (DAAA), United States Association for Blind Athletes (USABA), United States Cerebral Palsy Athletic

Association (USCPAA), and Wheelchair and Ambulatory Sports USA (WSUSA) just to name a few (Winnick, 2000).

The Paralympics is the most elite competition for individuals with physical or visual disabilities. The pioneer of the Paralympics was a doctor named Sir Ludwig Guttmann of the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in England (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). In 1948, while the Olympic Games were being held in London, he organized a sports competition for wheelchair athletes at Stoke Mandeville. This was the origin of the Stoke Mandeville Games which evolved into the modern Paralympic Games (Hums & MacLean, 2008).

The Paralympic Games are the equivalent of the Olympic Games and are primarily for athletes with physical disabilities or visual impairments. The Paralympics are held every 4 years in the same locations and venues as the Olympics and they start just a few weeks after the Olympics closing ceremonies (Stran & Hardin, in press). The Paralympic Games, “which began life as an event with strong social implications and with therapeutic ends, have become the most important sporting event for people with disabilities” (Winnick, 2000, p. 39). Currently, the Paralympic Games are governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and they are also recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Winnick).

Although there tends to be some confusion, the Paralympics and the Special Olympics are completely different. As noted previously, the Special Olympics are for individuals with intellectual disabilities who, depending on the level of disability and athletic ability of the participants, sometimes require assistance in their events. The Paralympics, however, are for elite athletes, with physical or visual disabilities, who must try out in order to compete and do not require assistance in order to participate in their sport or event.

Collegiate Sport Opportunities for Individuals with Physical Disabilities

Although there are many opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities to actively participate in sport, one area still seems to be lacking and that is the ability for individuals with physical disabilities to participate in collegiate sports. Currently, there are four sports offered at the collegiate level: wheelchair basketball, wheelchair track and field, wheelchair tennis, and wheelchair rugby. Wheelchair basketball is the most popular of these sports and offers the most variety in teams where there are eight collegiate teams for men and five for women. Wheelchair tennis and wheelchair track and field are offered at three different universities and wheelchair rugby is only offered at two universities (Stran & Hardin, in press).

In the United States, wheelchair basketball began in 1946 and in 1949, The National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) was formed (Owen, 1982). Wheelchair basketball was the “first nationally organized sport for individuals with lower extremity impairments” (Hedrick, Byrnes & Shaver, 1994, p. ix). The NWBA provides wheelchair basketball teams for qualified individuals in the United States and Canada (NWBA, 2007). The NWBA currently provides over 200 wheelchair basketball teams that span across seven divisions and 22 conferences (Stran & Hardin, in press). These include men’s, women’s, intercollegiate, and youth wheelchair basketball teams (NWBA).

Collegiate Wheelchair Basketball for Individuals with Physical Disabilities

The first collegiate wheelchair basketball team, a men’s team, was formed in 1949 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Hedrick et al., 1994). Nearly 20 years later, the University of Illinois also started the first women’s collegiate wheelchair basketball team (Owen, 1982). Currently, collegiate wheelchair basketball can be seen as a “sub-culture” within disability sport for individuals with physical disabilities due to its highly competitive nature.

Individuals with physical disabilities playing collegiate wheelchair basketball are often members of their countries' national wheelchair basketball teams and may participate with these teams in the Paralympics.

With more individuals with disabilities participating actively in physical education and sport, one can assume that these individuals would like to continue this participation and play sports at the college or university level. Similar to the table presented in the study done by Stran and Hardin (in press), Table 1 reflects the current competitive collegiate wheelchair basketball programs in the United States [Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, 2009; Southwestern Minnesota State University (SMSU), 2009; University of Arizona (UA), 2009; University of Alabama Wheelchair Athletics, (UAWA), 2007; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), 2007; University of Missouri (UM), 2009; University of Texas at Arlington (UTA); 2009; University of Wisconsin—Whitewater (UWW), 2008].

Table 1
Information on Collegiate Wheelchair Basketball Programs in the United States

College/University	Men's Basketball Team	Women's Basketball Team
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania	X	X
Southwest Minnesota State University	X	
University of Alabama	X	X
University of Arizona	X	X
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	X	X
University of Missouri	X	

Table 1 (con't)

College/University	Men's Basketball Team	Women's Basketball Team
University of Texas at Arlington	X	
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater	X	X

Physical education and particularly school sport are valued and resourced because of how both can help shape abilities, abilities created through the acquisition of skills and athletic performance (Wright & Burrows, 2006). Thinking of the individuals with physical disabilities who do play collegiate wheelchair sports and how they got started in their sport participation leads one to the question of how they experienced physical education.

Literature Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to examine students' perceptions of physical education combined with what we know about inclusion, to take it one step further and examine perceptions of physical education held by students with disabilities and, finally, examine disability sport and sporting opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities. Literature was reviewed in three sections. The first section provided an overview of inclusive education and provided a background of legislation that mandated the inclusion of students with disabilities into education and, more specifically, physical education. The second section examined perceptions of physical education experiences among students with and without disabilities. Finally, the third section examines disability sport and the opportunities that are provided to individuals with physical disabilities.

In reviewing this literature, some of the following key ideas were affirmed:

1. The history and evolution of inclusive education has provided a demographic change in modern day classrooms throughout the United States. The number of individuals with disabilities in general physical education programs continues to increase (Block, 1994).

2. Understanding how students think, feel, and learn about particular subjects allows teachers an opportunity to make changes in their teaching strategies and curricula in order to educate a variety of students effectively (Erikson & Shultz, 1992; Sanders, 1996). The opportunity for students to participate meaningfully and competently contributes to positive experiences in physical education (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000).

3. Hearing the perceptions of students with disabilities can “inform our understandings of, and collaborations with, persons with a disability as well as their needs, interests and desires for attaining active, healthy lifestyles” (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000, p. 141). The voices of students with disabilities afford a unique vantage point from which to view the physical education environment provided for students’ with disabilities in our schools today.

4. The number of individuals with disabilities involved in sport and physical recreation is steadily increasing and organized sport for athletes with a disability is generally divided into three broad disability groups: the deaf, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and individuals with physical disabilities (Legg & Steadward, 2002).

5. Although there are many opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities to actively participate in sport, one area still seems to be lacking and that is the ability for individuals with physical disabilities to participate in collegiate sports.

The primary implication from this literature review is that legislature mandates that children with disabilities be educated in physical education just as children without disabilities are educated in physical education. It is important that physical educators listen to student voices

to understand the meaning students assign to their physical education experiences (Solmon & Carter, 1995) and how these physical education experiences influence their future decisions to participate in physical activity and sport or their desire to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In terms of inclusion, by giving students with disabilities voice and hearing how they reflect on or perceive their experiences in physical education, physical educators stand to gain insight on how these students perceive the physical education environment.

Purpose of Study

As previously stated, including the voices of students with disabilities in our research will deepen our understanding of disability and assist us in identifying barriers within physical education that are most meaningful to these students (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Reid, 1989). Information regarding how individuals with physical disabilities experience physical education, such as college wheelchair athletes, must be gained. Keeping this in mind, the purpose of this study was to examine the physical education experiences of college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities. In order to accomplish this, these college wheelchair athletes had to reflect on their physical education experiences throughout school. The college athletes' prior physical education experiences will generally be defined by each individual's meaning of these experiences. A second purpose of this study was to use these college wheelchair athletes' reflections on their physical education experiences to gain insight on how individuals with physical disabilities experience physical education firsthand.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the data collection and analysis:

1. How did college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities experience physical education in elementary, middle school, and high school?
2. Do college wheelchair athletes feel they were included equally and meaningfully throughout their physical education experiences?
3. What meaning, if any, do college wheelchair athletes give to their prior physical education experiences?

Significance of Study

A thorough literature review has not identified any research on how college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities have experienced physical education. Instead, studies have been done on how middle school and high school wheelchair athletes are experiencing physical education (Stran, Hargreaves, & Hardin, in review). Examining how college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities experience physical education can only help deepen our understanding of disability and assist in identifying possible barriers within physical education that are most meaningful to these students (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Reid, 1989). Understanding the perspectives of students with physical disabilities who are currently enrolled in physical education can provide helpful information in establishing how individuals with disabilities are experiencing physical education at a certain school or during a certain grade level. However, using college students with physical disabilities to reflect on their physical education experiences allows for a broader perspective of the school experiences in physical education.

College wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities have made a decision to continue active participation in physical activity and sport. This decision to continue active participation in physical activity and sport may or may not have been impacted by the experiences they had in physical education, but clearly they are vested in wanting to participate in sport and be physically

active. Although it may not be true, one could assume that if college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities want to be active and participate in sport now, they may have felt this way throughout their grade school physical education.

By examining college wheelchair athletes' reflections on their physical education experiences we will gain insight on how these individuals with physical disabilities experienced physical education firsthand. This is important because having this information will help us understand what, if anything, in physical education curriculums needs to be changed. The findings of this study could possibly change the way educators not only learn to teach, but also how they teach physical education. Understanding college wheelchair athletes' reflections will also provide an opening for future research on how to include individuals with disabilities equally and meaningfully in the physical education setting.

Including students with disabilities is not just a good idea; it is mandated by legislation (Heward, 2006). In order to find out if individuals with physical disabilities are being included in physical education equally and meaningfully, we must ask these individuals and give voice to their reflections. These voices offer a unique vantage point from which to view the physical education experiences provided to individuals with physical disabilities throughout schools in the United States.

Glossary of Terms

Physical Disability. A disability that typically hinders mobility or the ability to use one or more parts of the skeletomuscular system of the body. An individual with a physical disability often uses a walker, crutches, or wheelchair to aid with mobility.

Congenital Disability. Refers to a condition present at birth.

Acquired Disability. Refers to a condition that occurs after birth.

Disability Sport. Sports played by individuals with a disability.

Wheelchair Athlete. Athlete who participates in wheelchair sports and uses a wheelchair in order to do so.

Paralympics. Worldwide sport movement for elite athletes with disabilities.

Special Olympics. Worldwide sport movement for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Inclusion. Refers to providing specially designed instruction, including support services when necessary, to students with disabilities within regular physical education (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991).

Assumptions

The assumptions inherent in this study are as follows:

1. It was assumed that the college wheelchair athletes participating in this study had physical education.
2. It was assumed that the participants were honest and sincere while participating in this study.
3. It was assumed that the participants were able to accurately reflect on their individual physical education experiences.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are considered to be as follows:

1. The researcher was actively involved in the sub-culture of wheelchair athletics and did have preconceived notions of what the participants may have experienced in their physical education classes.

2. The participants in this study were all college wheelchair athletes and their reflections on physical education experiences may have differed from individuals with physical disabilities who were not involved in sports.

3. Not all of the participants in this study were required to take physical education every year throughout their grade school so the amount of data collected on each participant varied.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the physical education experiences of college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities. A second purpose of this study was to use the reflections from college wheelchair athletes' on their physical education experiences to gain insight on how individuals with physical disabilities experience physical education firsthand.

In this chapter, the methods and procedures selected for use in this study are presented in the following arrangement: (a) role of the researcher, (b) conceptual framework, (c) participants, (d) data collection techniques, (e) data analysis techniques, and (f) data trustworthiness.

Role of the Researcher

This study was an interpretive study so the researcher used qualitative methods to collect the data. Since the researcher is a key component in any qualitative study, it is important to take note that the researcher is an able-bodied female who has played able-bodied sports since she was 3 years old. The researcher also participated in organized wheelchair sport for 4 years and, at the time of this study, was currently serving as an assistant coach for a women's wheelchair basketball team.

Due to the researcher's involvement in disability sport, it is impossible to say that the researcher did not have any personal relationships with some of the participants. However, the researcher believed these personal relationships only further allowed the participants to feel comfortable while reflecting on their physical education experiences. Outside of the interactions

involved directly with this study, this study was never talked about amongst the researcher and individual participants. The researcher also met with her faculty advisor to monitor research activities.

The researcher is a certified physical education teacher and has been very involved with disability sport, therefore the researcher acknowledges preconceived attitudes and perceptions about inclusion in physical education for students' with disabilities. During the time of this study, the researcher attempted not to let her opinions and perceptions interfere with the data collection and analysis. The researcher tried capture and describe the reflections on physical education experiences of each individual participant as told by the participant.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was grounded in Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism theory, which asserted that phenomena are given meaning through experiences. Perceptions evolve as individuals define and redefine reality through social interactions (Solmon & Carter, 1995). The focus of this study was to add voices of collegiate wheelchair athletes to that of teachers, parents, classmates, administrators, and researchers in the discussion of inclusive physical education by asking the question: How do college wheelchair athletes reflect on their physical education experiences? The term reflection was used to refer to the interpretations and meanings of these reflections that these individuals with disabilities have assigned to their own physical education experiences (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000).

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized in order to address the meaning of the individuals' reflections on physical education experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology was described by van Manen (1990) as "research as oriented towards lived experience and interpreting the 'texts' of life" (p. 4). This is not only a description, but an interpretive process in

which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). In this case, the researcher made an interpretation of the meaning of the participants' reflections on their physical education experiences.

The conceptual framework guided the interview questions in data collection and also served as a structure for data analysis. Questions guided by the conceptual framework were asked of the participants and their answers and actions are what helped generate themes within the data analysis. The questions focused on reflecting back on their physical education experiences and how they assigned meaning to these experiences.

Participants

The 10 participants for this study were college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities, enrolled at the same university located in the Southeastern United States. The researcher chose participants who were over the age of 19 and had participated in elementary, middle, or high school physical education in the United States. Of the 10 participants, 5 were male and 5 were female. Unintentionally, all 10 participants chosen were Caucasian and the 5 female participants all had congenital disabilities whereas the 5 male participants all acquired their disabilities.

The participants had various physical disabilities and came from a wide variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as geographical locations throughout the United States. Table 2 provides a detailed summary table of the participants' age range, gender, disability, onset of disability, and the geographical location in which they grew up. The age range was used to help protect the confidentiality of the participants and was defined in three ranges: a) early 20s (19-21 years old), (b) mid-20s (22-24 years old), and c) late 20s (25-30 years old). The participants had varied educational levels; however, all the participants were currently

enrolled as full-time college students at the time of this study and one participant was a graduate student.

Table 2

Information on Each Individual Participant

Name/ Gender	Age Range (Twenties)	Disability	Onset	Geographical Location (U.S.)
Meredith (F)	Early	Spina Bifida	Congenital	Mid-Atlantic: Northeast
Mark (M)	Early	Dystonia	Genetic	East North Central: Midwest
Justin (M)	Early	Spinal Cord Injury-Tumor	Acquired	East North Central: Midwest
Fred (M)	Late	Spinal Cord Injury	Acquired	Southeastern
Lexie (F)	Late	Cerebral Palsy	Congenital	New England: Northeast
Callie (F)	Early	Amputee-Foot	Congenital	Southeastern
Alex (M)	Early	Spinal Cord Injury	Acquired	West South Central: South
Robbins (F)	Mid	Cerebral Palsy	Congenital	Mountain: West
Reed (M)	Early	Spinal Cord Injury-Stroke	Acquired	East North Central: Midwest
Elizabeth (F)	Early	Osteogenesis Imperfecta	Congenital	Mid-Atlantic: Northeast

The researcher personally explained the study and requested the college wheelchair athletes' permission to participate in this study by telephone. In order to participate in this study,

the participants had to be actively participating in organized college wheelchair sport, willing to participate in this study and they had to sign a written consent form agreeing to participate in this study. All participants signed the consent form that outlines the requirements of their participation in the study (Appendix A). IRB was approved by the researcher's institution and the researcher created pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of all the participants.

Data Collection

The data collection techniques for this study included two semi-structured interviews with each participant and two separate focus group interviews. The participants were interviewed individually in the semi-structured interviews for approximately 90 minutes. Then the participants were divided into two different groups for focus group interviews. Both focus group interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In the first semi-structured interview, the researcher used a designed protocol comprised of background questions in order to establish a thick description of each participant. During this interview participants described in detail their disability, how they were raised, their interests, and their sport and physical activity background (Appendix B). The semi-structured background interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were audio taped and transcribed.

In the second semi-structured interview, the researcher used a designed protocol as an aid in documenting the college wheelchair athletes' reflections on physical education experiences. In this interview, all of the questions were about the participants' physical education and sporting experiences. The protocol was designed in four sections: (a) questions about elementary school physical education, (b) questions about middle school physical education and sporting experiences), (c) questions about high school physical education and sporting experiences, and

(d) questions about college physical activity and sporting experiences (Appendix C). The physical education experiences interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio taped and transcribed.

Focus Group Interviews

Qualitative researchers have widely adopted focus groups as a research tool (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), focus group interviews are “group interviews that are structured a particular way and have specific and have specific, well defined goals” (p.100). Focus group interviews are usually made up of participants and a facilitator. The facilitator introduces a topic and then participants are encouraged to comment in turn as well as in a group dialogue format. For this study the focus group interview technique was employed in order to gain additional knowledge about the participants’ physical education experiences.

After the completion of all 20 semi-structured interviews, the researcher divided the 10 participants into two groups: Focus Group A and Focus Group B. Five of the participants were placed in Group A and the remaining five participants were placed in group B. The participant placement in these two groups was primarily done based on the participants’ availability. Focus Group A included two males and three females, and focus Group B consisted of three males and two females. In order to help provoke the participants’ thoughts during the focus group interview, the researcher asked them to bring an “artifact” to the interview that represented their physical education experiences. Artifacts can be used to initiate a self-revealing take of a person’s view on experiences they have had (Allport, 1942). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) artifacts can be written documents, paintings, drawings, objects, photographs, music, etc.

Personal artifacts can be used to explain an individual’s actions, experiences, and beliefs (Plummer, 1983; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Artifacts can also provide researchers with “personal

information that may have been unavailable from other sources” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 52). The meaning behind the participants bringing their personal artifacts to the focus group interview was to allow the participants to talk more openly and freely about their physical education experiences. The artifacts provided the participants the opportunity to share directly their “reality” and at the same time it helped capture attention visually (Creswell, 1994). A secondary purpose of using the artifact in the focus group interviews was to see if one’s artifact happened to spark additional thoughts and reflections from other participants on their physical education experiences. A detailed summary with the participants’ artifact chosen to represent their physical education experiences in the focus group interview, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Information on Focus Group Interviews and Artifacts

Name	Age Range (Twenties)	Disability	Focus Group	Artifact
Callie	Early	Amputee-Foot	A	Whistle
Elizabeth	Early	Osteogenesis Imperfecta	A	Certificate for V Sit-n-reach School Record
Fred	Late	Spinal Cord Injury	A	Presidential Fitness Patch
Lexie	Late	Cerebral Palsy	A	Strap
Mark	Early	Dystonia	A	Multi-purpose Ball
Alex	Early	Spinal Cord Injury	B	Picture of His College
Justin	Early	Spinal Cord Injury-Tumor	B	Picture of a Park Bench Signing Day

Table 3 (con't)

Name	Age Range (Twenties)	Disability	Focus Group	Artifact
Meredith	Early	Spina Bifida	B	Picture of a Volleyball
Reed	Early	Spinal Cord Injury- Stroke	B	Picture of a Game of Dodge Ball
Robbins	Mid	Cerebral Palsy	B	Basketball

The two focus group interviews took place on the same day, but at separate times. Due to the fact the focus groups took place on the same day, the researcher has referred to the two different groups as “Focus Group A” and “Focus Group B,” in order to distinguish between each group. The researcher served as the facilitator in both of these focus group interviews.

During the focus group interviews each of the five participants (five in “Group A” and five in “Group B”) in the group spoke in turn and explained their individual artifact and the reason for bringing it to the interview as a representation of their physical education experiences. Throughout the focus group interview, the researcher asked clarifying and open-ended questions. After each participant talked about their artifact, the researcher asked the remaining four participants questions regarding to the artifact being talked about. This in turn often provoked further group discussion. Both the focus group interviews were videotaped and transcribed (Appendix D). The researcher videotaped the focus group interviews in order to visually capture the artifacts that were brought in by the participants and participants’ nonverbal communications.

Data Analysis

Although it allows for limited generalization (Stacks & Hocking, 1999), for this study, the researcher used analytic induction to analyze all 20 of the individual semi-structured

interview transcripts and the two separate focus group transcripts (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This process allowed the researcher to draw themes and commonalities from the data which allowed the researcher to establish the reflections of the participants (Hardin, 2005). Analytic induction is a suitable way to ascertain participants' reflections and thoughts. Information gathered from all the interviews and the focus group interviews were compiled to form a composite of college wheelchair athletes' views regarding the reflections of their physical education experiences.

In order to analyze the data, the researcher used the guidelines laid out by Huberman and Miles (1995) using the four stages of data analysis in qualitative research. In the first stage, data collection and preliminary analysis were conducted (Huberman & Miles). Themes emerging from the first semi-structured background interview transcripts and the second semi-structured physical education experiences interview transcripts were used to establish an initial set of categories. After the initial categories were established, the researcher then compared these categories to data collected from both of the focus group interview transcripts.

In the second stage, data reduction, data were coded, summarized, and clustered into a second set of categories (Huberman & Miles, 1995). The conceptual framework served as a guide in the coding of answers into the clusters from the reflections of physical education experiences. For example, answers to questions about participation in elementary school were placed into a cluster of "elementary school physical education" and then themes were drawn from those answers regarding the participants' reflections on their physical education experiences in elementary school.

The third stage of data analysis is data display (Huberman & Miles, 1995). In this stage the data were organized into smaller forms and assorted constructs (Hardin, 2005). This allowed

the researcher to not only display the main categories that developed from the data, but also the sub-categories which the researcher believed fell under each main category. The fourth and final stage of data analysis is conclusion drawing and verification (Huberman & Miles, 1995). In this stage, the researcher interpreted and assigned meaning of all the participants' reflection on their physical education experiences and present the essence of the phenomenon.

Data Trustworthiness

A researcher can establish data trustworthiness in a qualitative study through data triangulation. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), triangulation is defined as, "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p. 79). In this study, the researcher achieved triangulation by attempting to connect the themes noted in the semi-structured background interview transcripts, the semi-structured physical education experiences interview transcripts, and the two focus interview transcripts. The researcher used member checks in order to establish trustworthiness of the interview transcripts and themes.

Member checks consisted of returning the data collected to the participants for them to examine. This process allowed the participants to confirm, refute, or revise anything they said and/or believed to be inaccurate. Both of the taped interviews as well as the two transcripts were given back to the participants for the member check. The participants were asked to read the transcriptions and confirm, dispute, or revise them in any way they deemed necessary.

Both focus group interview transcripts were returned to the participants for a member check. The researcher used a flip video camera to videotape both of the focus group interviews so she was able to upload and email the video to the participants involved in each of the two

focus groups. Similarly to the individual interviews, the participants were asked to read the transcriptions and confirm, dispute, or revise them in any way they deemed necessary.

As themes were identified within the data, the researcher checked back with the participants for comments and verification. Once the member checks were completed, the researcher presented the finalized data. At this time, the participants were asked to verify the data one last time making sure that there had been no misrepresentation of their thoughts and reflections in the findings.

CHAPTER III

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter provides a detailed description of each of the participants' backgrounds. The following profiles are presented in the order in which the interviews took place. In order to protect each of the participants' identity and confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for their names, where they grew up, and for any team or school names they may have mentioned during the study. The data presented in the participant profiles was gathered from the individual semi-structured background interviews that were recorded and transcribed.

Meredith

Meredith is a Caucasian female in her early 20s. At the time of this study, Meredith was in her fourth year of her undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where she was majoring in Special Education in a collaboration program that will certify her to teach Special Education students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Meredith does not walk at all and uses an everyday wheelchair.

Meredith grew up in the Mid-Atlantic division of the Northeastern region of the United States where she attended public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. When asked to explain exactly what her physical disability is, Meredith described it as follows:

It was congenital. I have Spina Bifida at the T-11/12 area of the spine and I don't walk at all. I used to have braces on my legs until I was like 7 I stopped using them and the disability comes with hydrocephalus so I've got a shunt, that's really about it though. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Meredith is an only child who grew up with her mother and father and considers her family “pretty close and involved” (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10) in each other’s lives. None of her family members has a physical disability.

Meredith spent time going over activities she did with her family growing up by stating,

Well just growing up we went to church, we went to uh my dad actually became my hockey coach so when I would go to Bristle every weekend they would, for a while they would both travel and then just he would travel with me. He was the assistant coach in basketball eventually and just kinda helped run the program and we did a lot together. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

As evidenced through her answer, it was clear that Meredith grew up actively participating in sports. The researcher also asked her if she did the same kinds of activities with her friends growing up to which she responded,

Yeah I mean pretty much during the week I would hang out with school friends and just you know go around town, but like on the weekends it was always sports practice in Bristle. I drove an hour and a half to get there and back and like I would stay at a friend’s house like over the weekend we’d have practice 2 days in a row and then that would be it. Like it would be like a 9 to 5 practice each day. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10).

At the time of this study, Meredith was actively competing on a collegiate women’s wheelchair basketball team as well as being physically active outside of wheelchair basketball practice. She talked about why she enjoys physical activity by saying “I like pretty much all of it I mean I just like to stay active. I feel healthier when I do” (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10).

Meredith said she enjoys both individualized physical activity as well as group involved physical activity, depending on what she is trying to accomplish.

Meredith began participating in sports around the age of three.

I think I started swimming with an able-bodied swim team when I was like 10. But, I’ve always been swimming, like I started when I was three just recreationally and then more organized sports I guess I got onto a team for physically disabled kids in Bristle when I was like 12 so since then solidly. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Meredith credited her start in swimming to a friend of hers who also had Spina Bifida and was swimming on her school's able-bodied swim team. Then she found out there was a regional competition just a few miles from her house and that if she qualified she'd be eligible to go to junior nationals. Although she credits her start in sports with swimming, she also mentioned that she participated in hockey, wheelchair track, and wheelchair basketball throughout her childhood.

Meredith came to the university in order to play on the women's wheelchair basketball team. When asked how she heard of the university and the team she responded,

When I was in Australia for track and swimming I met Larry and Ellen and they pretty much told me about the team at that time they thought I was only interested in track so they didn't tell me about basketball as much but you know, I don't really know how I got involved with them again. Maybe it was at um I think maybe my parents saw them again knowing they'd been in Australia and they'd talked to them at like a basketball championship thing. So I learned about the team through them. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Although at the time of the study she was in her fourth year of college, she said she still had two more semesters until she would graduate. Meredith said that she planned on continuing playing sports until she graduated, but when asked about continuing to play sports after graduation she responded with "yeah I think so. We'll see about that but yeah you know wherever I end up [laughs]" (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10).

Mark

Mark is a Caucasian male in his early 20s. At the time of this study, Mark was in his third year of his undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where he was majoring in Physical Education. Upon graduating with his degree in physical education he would be certified to teach physical education to students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Mark can walk, but typically uses an everyday wheelchair.

Mark grew up in the East North Central division of the Midwest region of the United States where he attended public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. When asked to explain what his physical disability is, Mark described it when he said, “I have dystonia, a genetic neuromuscular disorder that caused my brain to send involuntary neurotransmissions to my muscles in rapid succession so they spasm. It’s the isolated gene that I have the DY-T1 gene” (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10). When the researcher asked Mark how his family became aware of the disability he replied,

I have generalized dystonia and what happens you’re normal until you’re between the ages of like 5 and 9 and then you just start showing symptoms when you’re in that age range. So when I was, well the age is kind of fuzzy, so I’m going to go say between 6 and 7 in there, I started showing symptoms and they got progressively worse so we went everywhere under the sun and I was misdiagnosed like six times. Finally, a guy at Children’s, I think it was Children’s, ran tests for that particular gene and I was positive. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Mark grew up with his mother, father, and younger brother and he considers his family to be very close. His mom and one of his cousins have the DY-T1 gene and three of his other cousins are positive for the gene, but it is recessive.

Mark spent time going over activities he did with his family growing up.

“My dad and I are big outdoors men. We hunted, we fished, you know sports obviously. I played tee ball and pee wee soccer growing up. My dad and I are kind of gear heads we worked on cars a lot” (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10).

The researcher also asked Mark if he did the same kinds of activities with his friends growing up to which he responded,

With friends it was mostly sports. Like you know pick up football games, pick up baseball games. There’s a park right by the house so we’d ride down to the park on our bikes and play pick up football and soccer (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10).

At the time of this study, Mark was actively competing on a collegiate men's wheelchair basketball team as well as being physically active outside of wheelchair basketball practice. He talked about how he loves physical activity and what types he enjoys doing by saying,

I love it. Any kind, like cardio's cool. I wouldn't just go out and run a mile just for the hell of it, but I always incorporate cardio into my activities, going to the gym, playing catch out with my brother that was the big thing in high school. He was a wide receiver and I could always throw a good pass so we worked out in the backyard with patterns and stuff. Like I said pretty much everything, I was always active. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

When asked if he prefers individualized or group physical activity, Mark responded,

Either or I mean it really didn't matter. I had no problem walking down to the pond by my house and going fishing all day, like packing and going fishing alone. I could just as easily go play baseball at the baseball diamond by my house with a big group of friends. It was kind of whatever was available for that day. I just can't sit still. When I sit still I get bored. Even if it's going to the gym like just to work out on my own whether it's lifting or shooting or pushing, I can't sit still. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Mark began participating in sports around the age of 5 and credits his parents for influencing his start. Mark actually heard about this university because they had started a men's wheelchair basketball team. When asked if that was his reason for coming to this university he said, "I came to get an education but the sports part was a big, big influential factor in coming here" (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10). Mark said he has a year left of college until he graduates and then he plans on attending graduate school.

Mark emphasized that he plans to continue to play sports by saying, "I'll probably play sports until my eligibility runs out. We have eligibility rules so we have 5 years" (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10). The researcher then asked Mark if he would continue to play sports after he graduated to which he responded,

I'll definitely say involved athletically. It won't be at the level that I am now like I'm sure I'll probably take a little time off to get my feet under me in the professional field, but then I'm sure at some point I'll get bored again and I'll play for a club team somewhere. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Justin

Justin is a Caucasian male in his early 20s. At the time of this study, Justin was in his second year of his undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where he was majoring in Occupational Therapy and minoring in Psychology. although he admitted it was possible that he would be changing his major and minor before the following year. Justin does not walk at all and uses an everyday wheelchair.

Justin grew up in the East North Central division of the Midwest region of the United States where he attended public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. When asked to explain exactly what his physical disability is, Justin explained, “I had a tumor on my back when I was a couple years old and they removed it and that was it” (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10). The tumor was attached to a piece of his spine and when the researcher asked him to explain how it was discovered he responded,

They...I felt like there was something wrong with my right leg and then they x-rayed it and then when they, I don't really know the whole story, but then they found the tumor. If they would have found it when I was younger then it wouldn't have been as bad like I probably wouldn't have been as paralyzed but I still would have been paralyzed, but not as bad. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

Justin grew up with his mother, father, and older brother and he considers his family to be “way too close” (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10). None of his family members has a disability. Justin spent time going over activities he did with his family growing up by stating,

Playing sports . . . I played a lot of sports. I used to crawl around instead of use a wheelchair until I was like 6 years old so we would just play. I'd always play catch with my dad or my brother or whatever. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

As evidenced through his answer, it was clear that Justin grew up actively participating in sports. The researcher also asked him if he did the same kinds of activities with his friends growing up to which he responded by stating “any sport we could play. I used to play tackle football when I

was a kid, like real young, but then I hurt my neck . . . so yeah [laughing] I was too small”
(Interview, Justin, 3/15/10).

A the time of this study, Justin was actively participating on a collegiate men’s wheelchair basketball team as well as being physically active outside of wheelchair basketball practice. He talked about enjoying physical activity and what types he enjoys when he answered, “I love physical activity. Yeah anything . . . anything with contact. I like playing basketball and football the most and I’ll pretty much play any sport. I’ll play catch, anything . . . well anything where I’m moving” (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10). He also said that he prefers doing physical activity and playing sports both in a group environment, but there were a few things he mentioned he likes to do alone:

I would like, like say when I used to shoot I used to practice a lot more I would do that on my own and if I would workout I would work out on my own. I don’t like to I like to practice with the team, but I don’t like to work out with people I like to work out on my own . . . stuff to get better I like to do on my own. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

Justin started participating in sports around the age of 5 and at the time of this study he was in his 15th year of playing wheelchair basketball. He also played “little league baseball with able-bodied kids” (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10) for a year when he was around the age of 9 or 10. He credits his dad for influencing his start in sports. His dad put him in a league individuals with disabilities, but when Justin realized it was more individuals with intellectual disabilities he did not want to play in that league anymore. At this point, he claimed to have stumbled on wheelchair basketball play and had been playing ever since.

Justin came to the university in order to play on the men’s wheelchair basketball team. He was recruited by the men’s wheelchair basketball team’s head coach and received a scholarship to play wheelchair basketball. Although at the time of the study he was in his second year of college, when the researcher asked him how much longer he had until he would graduate

he responded with “ probably like five years [laughs]” (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10). He plans to continue to play sports until he graduates, but his plans for after he graduates were up in the air. Justin dreams on making a USA men’s Paralympic wheelchair basketball team and winning a gold medal. He said, “I want people to be like he’s the best class two in the world and then I will never play again” (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10).

Fred

Fred is a Caucasian male in his late 20s. At the time of this study, Fred was currently in his fourth year of his undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where he had just switched his major to Physical Education. It is important to note that Fred had attended several other higher education institutions before attending this one. Fred attended a 4-year university located in the Midwest region of the United States, a junior college and a 4-year college both located in the Southeastern region of the United States, and also an Art Institute located in the Southeastern United States. He has two Associate’s degrees. Fred does not walk at all and uses an everyday wheelchair.

Fred grew up in the Southeastern United States, in a different state from the university at which this study took place, where he attended a private school from kindergarten through seventh grade. In eighth grade he attended a public school before going to a preparatory high school. When asked to explain exactly what his physical disability is, Fred said, I’m a T5-T6 incomplete paraplegic” (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10). Fred was 16 when he became a paraplegic in a car accident. When asked who informed him that he was a paraplegic he gave a very detailed description of finding out when he stated,

Yeah well like I had a bunch of like my stomach was cut in half, my spleen was severed, I broke eight ribs, I crushed my sternum, my collar bone was broken, I had a dislocated shoulder, a dislocated wrist, um a half inch skull fracture [points to one place on his skull], an 8½ inch skull fracture [points to a different location on his skull], uh I had 5

feet of my large intestine shoved into my pelvic bone so I was you know from topical it just looked like I was the least hurt of the two cause the guy riding with me lost his right leg above the knee, but then when they got in and started seeing everything that was wrong with me like both my lungs were punctured and collapsed so I was struggling. I spent 6 weeks in a coma and then when I woke up my dad was like I got something bad to tell you. He was like you're not going to be able to move your legs. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Fred grew up in a split home because his parents divorced before he was 1 year old. Both of his parents lived in the same city so he would spend a week at his dad's house and then a week at his mom's house and continue rotating. Fred has a half brother from his dad's first marriage that is about 10 years older than him and a half brother from his mom's marriage after his father who is about 13 years younger than him. He also considers his family "very close and involved" (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10) in what he does. The only family member he had with a disability was his grandfather, who became paralyzed on one side after having a stroke in his older age.

Fred spent time going over activities he did with his family growing up when he said. "we still play Frisbee golf, we shoot baskets, we throw the football, we throw the baseball, wrestle and play video games" (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10). As evidenced through his answer, it was clear that Fred grew up actively participating in sports. The researcher also asked him if he did the same types of activities with his friends growing up to which he responded,

Yeah you I know mean it used to be we would play games all the time and play sports all the time and after I got hurt I couldn't quite play with them like I would still go try and play with them but it was a little different you know. I would always be like running into somebody [laughs] yeah they weren't really happy about that so yeah, but my friends now we you know go out, like go to the bars, sometimes we go play, like go shoot at the shooting range. I go play golf with my friends still so pretty much the same stuff as I did before. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

At the time of this study, Fred was still involved with the collegiate men's wheelchair basketball team and he was also serving as one of the assistant coaches on the women's

wheelchair basketball team. Fred said that he enjoyed doing physical activity besides just playing basketball,

I like to swim. I like to be in the water because it makes me feel like I don't have any limitations when I'm in the water. I like to play golf because I've always had a love for the game. As far as I don't like to run so I don't like cross country or track or anything like that. I mean I like to push up and down a court when there's a reason like when I'm playing tennis I'll push, but I just don't like distance running I just don't see a point in it. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Fred began participating in sports a very young age. He said, "I hit my first golf ball when I was 2½ years old so I've been playing sports for like 28 almost 29 years" (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10).

Fred credited his start in sports his father because his father had taken an old set of gold clubs and cut them down for him.

Fred came to the university in order to play on the men's wheelchair basketball team. At the time he learned about the team, he was living in the same state as the university. When asked how he heard about the team and how he decided to come play he responded,

I was working 60 hours and two jobs a week in Mosston after my father passed and uh they said they were starting a program up here and I just happened to meet Mickey and Larry at the right time and they offered me some help um if I wanted to come up here and play and they said they would try and get my eligibility years back and I said yeah, and I left and came up here. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Although at the time of the study Fred was in his fourth year of college, he said he still had about 2 years left until he would graduate. Fred said he would potentially like to continue to play sports until he graduates, but he also mentioned that he would "like to potentially go play in Europe or Australia, but I would like to get my degree first" (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10). He also stated that he would continue to play sports and remain physically active after he graduates.

Lexie

Lexie is a Caucasian female in her late 20s. At the time of this study, Lexie was in her first year of graduate school at a university located in the Southeastern United States where she

was pursuing a master's degree in Special Education with a kindergarten through sixth grade certification. It is important to note that Lexie had attended another higher education institution for her undergraduate degree before attending this one. Lexie attended a 4- year university located in the Northeast region of the United States. She also worked for 2 years with AmeriCorps before deciding to return to graduate school. Lexie walks using crutches, but also has an everyday wheelchair that she sometimes uses.

Lexie was born in Africa, but grew up in the New England division of the Northeast region of the United States where she attended public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. When asked what her disability is she said, "I have cerebral palsy" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10). Cerebral palsy is a congenital disability so the researcher asked Lexie when and how it was first noticed to which responded:

I can't remember the exact date of diagnosis, but I remember being aware of it around 4. I'm sure my parents noticed it right away because I was 3 months premature and I was in an incubator a while after I was born so they knew something was wrong so I think they were probably watching. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

Lexie grew up with her mother, father, and older sister and she considers her family "relatively close" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10) in each other's lives. None of her family members has a physical disability.

Lexie spent time going over activities she did with her family growing up by stating:

Well we have a cabin in Morgan so every summer we go up to our cabin and go fishing, and boating, and my dad likes to be outside so we would go on hikes so that kind of stuff. Kayaking too, so like a lot of outdoor stuff um but pretty much we're a big board game family. We love to sit around and like play Cranium and watch movies and typical stuff. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

As evidenced through her answer, it was clear Lexie grew up doing activities where she participated in physical activity and also activities where her family would just be hanging out. The researcher asked her if she did the same kinds of activities with her friends growing up, but

Lexie said she didn't do a lot of physical activity with her friends. It was more like they would "go to the movies and go out for coffee and stuff like that. Places you could go talk and movies, game and the mall you know typical things" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

Lexie talked with the researcher about watching sports both on television and in person while growing up. She watched both professional baseball and football with her dad and her sister was an athlete all through grade school as well as in college so her family would go and watch her sister compete. She also mentioned there was a single a baseball team nearby where she was from and she would go to those games. She actually described this experience by stating:

I worked for the single A team for 4 years total, but 2 of them were in high school and 2 of them were in college. So sometimes my friends would come and watch the games when I got off work (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

At the time of this study, Lexie was actively involved with the collegiate women's wheelchair basketball team as well as participating on a club track team in Buckley, a city about 45 minutes north of where the university is located. Lexie talked about enjoying physical activity and what she enjoys doing by saying,

I really like cardio and um marathoning and just anything that gets my heart going. I liked um I still like wheelchair basketball for like the game aspect and watching it and being a part of a team but in terms of physical benefit and like personal aspirations not so much anymore, but I really like cardio and lifting and pushing my body to the limit. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

After Lexie answered this question, the researcher then asked her if she preferred to do activities that were more group involved or more individualized and to which she responded,

Well the thing is, like all growing up all I did was like there wasn't like I did adapted skiing and I didn't really like it because I don't like cold and it wasn't like me doing it myself so much because I was younger and I did therapeutic horseback riding when I was growing up and my mom like really tried to push me into that but growing up it wasn't really like I was on the middle school and high school track team, but it was all with people who able-bodied so I wasn't really like competing against anybody so I

considered it more individual. I did 2 years of wheelchair basketball with a team in Cottonwood before I moved here and I really liked that. It was a different dynamic than it is here because it was like a community team and not so serious. Well it was serious, but it was just like we didn't see each other every day and it was a mixed age team so I was like one of the younger people on the team. And I like being a part of a team here, but it's definitely a lot more stressful than I thought it was going to be. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

Lexie began participating sports and physical activity around the age of 6. She participated in therapeutic horseback riding, adaptive skiing, track and field, and then around the age of 21 she stumbled on wheelchair basketball. She credits her influence to her mom and the physical therapy she did. Initially her family was her big motivator to be active and play sports, but she also said that now she "realized I had a passion about it like it wasn't being forced upon me anymore it was more self motivated" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

When the researcher asked Lexie how she found out about this university she responded:

Well I started, well someone told me that they had a wheelchair basketball camp and I was just getting started with wheelchair basketball and I was like oh this will be fun I'll go check it out so I did and I came down here for two summers and I just felt like there was more opportunities for physical activity down here. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

This response in turn paved the way for the researcher to then ask Lexie if she came to this university to play sports and be involved with the women's wheelchair basketball team while attending college. To this Lexie stated,

I don't think that it was a heavy influence I don't think that's like the primary reason, another reason was because I was happy with my life, but I'd been living in the Northeast all my life and I wanted to try a different part of the country and I figured what better time than to do it now while I'm single and I felt like I needed a change so I packed up and moved. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

At the time of this study, Lexie was in her first year of graduate school and she informed the researcher that she would graduate after 1 more year. Lexie said that she wants to continue to play sports and do physical activity until she graduates although she mentioned she is at "a cross roads right now and I'm still trying to figure out my schedule for next year" (Interview, Lexie,

3/22/10). Lexie also said that she plans to continue to participate in physical activity and sports after she graduates and even mentioned a possibility of moving in order to help provide her this opportunity. She explained it like this:

I'm going to go wherever gets me a good job and good health benefits. There's been some thoughts in the back of my mind about moving to Denver to train at the Olympic training center there, but it really depends and cause like right now it's a lot trying to balance there's so many things that I want and the two biggest things that I want right now are to be a Paralympic athlete and to be a teacher and oftentimes they conflict with each other. So it's just trying to figure out how to carve out and maximize all of my opportunities. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

Callie

Callie is a Caucasian female in her early 20s. At the time of this study, Callie was in her third year of her undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where she was majoring in Exercise Science with a minor in Nutrition. Callie walks, but she uses a prosthetic leg.

Callie was born in the same state as the university, but by the time she was 5 she had moved to another state in the Southeastern United States where she grew up until returning for college. In Buckley, she attended kindergarten in a public school and when she moved to Victoria she went to a private school from 1st grade through 12th grade. When asked what her physical disability is she responded with, "I am a right leg below the knee amputee" (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10). Callie is not really sure who first noticed she was missing her foot, but she recalls being told it was about 6 hours after she was born. She describes this by stating,

I don't know because I was taken out of the room and then because I was born blue and they thought my lungs were messed up so they had to bring me back 6 hours later and my dad told me mom, but I don't know who noticed. (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10)

Callie grew up with both parents until they got divorced when she was 15. She has an older brother and an older sister and says that her family is “not really involved” (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10) in each other’s lives. None of her family members has a physical disability.

When the researcher asked Callie what types of activities she did with her family growing up she did not mention anything so the researcher then asked her about what types of activities she did with her friends to which she responded, “we went to the beach a lot. We went to Six Flags a lot and we stayed in town a lot. I mean just whatever came up” (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10). Callie didn’t mention sports and physical activity in these two questions, but she later mentioned that she would watch sports on television and attend games with both her family and her friends.

At the time of this study, Callie was actively competing on a collegiate women’s wheelchair basketball team as well as being physically active outside of wheelchair basketball practice. She talked about why she enjoys physical activity and what types of activities she enjoys doing by saying, “I like to run because I’ve always ran (*sic*) and it’s just a habit. I like team sports more than individual sports” (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10). Upon hearing this, the researcher prompted Callie by asking her what kind of sports she liked, to which she responded,

If I’m just playing leisurely for fun, I like softball the most because I feel like it’s the most just fun have your friends comes out and play and if it’s going to competitively I would have to say basketball. (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10)

Callie said that she has been playing sports her entire life and she said she started around the age of 4 because she wanted to play tee ball. She also participated in “soccer, softball, gymnastics, basketball, track, cross country and cheerleading” (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10). Out of all 10 participants, Callie was the only one who did not come to this university to play sports; she knew about the university because her mother graduated from there. She actually found out

about the team after arriving and didn't start playing until the second semester of her first year in college. When the researcher asked her how she found out about the team she stated, "I was working out one day and the coach approached me in the weight room and asked me if I wanted to play wheelchair basketball" (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10).

Although at the time of the study Callie was in her third year of college, she said she still had 2 years until she would graduate. Callie said that she will continue her participation on the women's wheelchair basketball team until she graduates. She also confirmed that she will continue to be physically active and stay involved with sports after she graduates from college.

Alex

Alex is a Caucasian male in his early 20s. At the time of this study, Alex was in his third year of his undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where he was majoring in Business Management and working toward a computer science minor. Alex also attended another higher education institution, but this was during high school where he had dual enrollment with his high school and a local community college. Alex cannot walk and uses an everyday wheelchair.

Alex grew up in the West South Central division of the South region of the United States where he attended public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. When asked to describe his disability Alex said, "my disability is T-12 spinal cord injury and it wasn't completely severed, but it might as well have been. It's pretty much complete" (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10). Alex's spinal cord injury was acquired in a car accident 1 week after his 17th birthday. Alex grew up with his mother, father, and his younger sister and considers his family "very close. We're tight knit" (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10). None of his family members has a physical disability.

Alex spent time going over activities he did with his family growing up by stating,

You know we go on outings you know quite a bit you know of course I had my little teenage falling out and what not and same with my sister, but since I've gone off to school I've actually become closer so you know whenever I come home we're definitely out and about. We're going out to eat, going to see a movie, or going to the park you know whatever. And whenever, here's a little thing, whenever I first started playing wheelchair basketball my dad would go to the gym with me quite a bit and you know shag ball and whatnot. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

As evidenced through his answer, Alex was clearly very active. The researcher also asked him if he did the same types of activities with his friends growing up to which he responded,

Growing up of course you know it was a lot of hide and go seek, a lot of bicycles you know that kind of thing. Wrapping people's houses what not . . . um let me think. You know as I got older I played every sport there was to play whether I was good at it or not [laughs] um yeah very active. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Sports were a big part of Alex's life. He attended a lot of middle school and high school sports and he mentioned watching a lot of sports with his dad. Alex said he also went to a lot of sporting events with his friends.

At the time of this study, Alex was actively participating on a collegiate men's wheelchair basketball team as well as participating in physical activity outside of wheelchair basketball. He talked about enjoying wrestling, playing flag football and even sometimes tackle football. The researcher asked Alex if he enjoyed doing physical activity and playing sports more in a group or if he preferred for it to be more individualized, to which he responded,

Oh man I mean because growing up I was kind of like a subpar athlete that just tried really hard you know so I'd say team or group activities. You can all work towards one goal whereas individual activities that are sports like track or whatever it was more you have more weight on your shoulders and it was more about I guess individual pride whereas you know with a group or a team you know you can celebrate with someone if you win whereas if you win a track meet or something you're just celebrating by yourself. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Alex went even further with this when he said if it wasn't for one of his other teammates coming in to lift weights with him, he probably wouldn't be there. He enjoys having someone to hold him accountable.

Alex began participating in sports around the age of 4 or 5. He began playing tee ball for the local community youth center. When asked who influenced his start in playing sports he responded with,

I'd say my dad is a big influence in my life. He played high school sports and you know he never played college ball or anything, but he actually played for Grizzley High School also so you know we had a little family connection there so I always looked up to him and wanted to play varsity ball like he did so growing up that was a big part of it. I was one of the reasons we were so involved in the high school and my dad's actually on like whenever I was a junior, well actually sophomore, junior and senior year he was President of the Booster Club so you know it's kind of you know he played high school track and football so I looked up to him quite a bit so yeah he's my biggest influence. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Although Alex started participating sports with tee ball, he also mentioned that he participated in baseball, basketball, football, and track and field. Alex came to the university in order to play on the men's wheelchair basketball team. When asked how he heard of the university and the team he responded,

Well I was actually enrolled to go to Texas Agricultural University right out of high school it was actually about this time my senior year I had only been playing wheelchair basketball for you know a year, less than a year actually, and I just started getting to thinking you know that if I went to college at Texas Agricultural my worst fear would be that I'd be you know sitting around getting lazy probably over indulging myself [laughs] from certain substances but you know I didn't want to down that path so I talked to my dad about it and at this point, I'd been working out with UAT and David Garnet at UAT and he was a big influence in getting me into wheelchair basketball, probably one of the biggest . . . he really connected the dots as far as getting into practices and inviting me to practices and took me to Oklahoma one time to do a little three on three thing with Chris and some of the other guys so you know I talked to my dad and my dad talked to him and he kind of spread the word to Mickey. So really it was between UAT and here as far as coming and you know because I really like the big college atmosphere and whatnot and because UAT is more of a commuter school I definitely chose to come here as opposed to going to UAT. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Alex admitted that playing sports was a major reason for coming to this university. He was not on scholarship when he first arrived at the university, but at the time of the study he was receiving a scholarship. Although at the time of the study Alex was in his third year old college, he said he was actually close enough in credits to graduate after the following semester. However, he was planning on stretching out his last credits in order to be eligible to play wheelchair basketball the following spring. After graduating with his undergraduate degree he plans to go to graduate school and continue to play wheelchair basketball for his fifth year of eligibility. The researcher also asked Alex if he planned to continue to participate in physical activity and sport after graduating, to which he replied,

I do. Along with playing with UAT I also played with the Davidson Magic men's team in Davidson and I played quite a bit with them and whenever I go home for the summer or breaks or whatever I bring my chair home and I run with those guys and because they are so good it's definitely great competition to play with so you know ideally I'd like to uh I'd like to land a job in the Davidson metroplex so I can play also and be close to home. Honestly, it's pretty lucky for me that I have competition like that there it could carry over. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Robbins

Robbins is a Caucasian female in her mid-20s. At the time of this study, Robbins was in fifth year of her undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where she was double majoring in Biology and Psychology. She would be graduating in less than 2 months and she was hoping to attend medical school in the future. Robbins uses crutches to walk, but also has an everyday wheelchair that she sometimes uses.

Robbins grew up in the Mountain division of the West region of the United States where she was home schooled until the 9th grade and then she attended a private Christian school for 10th, 11th, and 12th grade. When asked to describe what her physical disability, Robbins described it as "Cerebral palsy and its spastic diplegia" (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10). Cerebral

palsy is a congenital disability and although Robbins said her parents thought she may have it when she was born she didn't think she was diagnosed until she was a year old. The researcher then asked her if the doctor was the first to notice, to which she responded,

Yeah well when I was born because I was born premature and they just warned my parents that I probably had it because my lungs were so underdeveloped but then like it wasn't until I kind of like started walking and stuff or like doing other motor skills that they realized that I was like a little bit delayed so then they were like yeah she does have it. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Robbins grew up with her mother, father, and older sister and she considers her family to be "very close" (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10) and involved in each other's lives. None of her family members has a specific disability, but she did talk about how one of her cousins has a bad back when she stated,

Like I have a cousin who had like a really bad back so he uses a wheelchair sometimes too, but I don't know like I can't remember what it's from like if it's related to a disability, I just know he has a really bad back. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Other than that, Robbins couldn't recall any other family members having a disability.

Robbins spent time going over activities she did with her family growing up by stating,

Um [paused] we go hiking a lot and we got to the movies a lot and we like eat meals together a lot when we're together like we're all we all live in different places now so it's a little more difficult but all eat together and um we get together for the holidays. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

After Robbins talked about the activities she did with her family the researcher asked her if she did the same kinds of activities with her friends growing up, to which she responded,

I go out for coffee a lot with my friends and go out to eat a lot and go see movies. And like we go like, we do like student event stuff . . . like we'll go see like theatre and those things . . . [pauses] I don't know if I can say go out to the bars and stuff like that . . . [Laughing]. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

The researcher also talked with Robbins about whether or not she grew up watching sports on television or attending sporting events with her family and friends. She said she remembered her

dad and sister watching sports on television, but she didn't really, but her family would attend her sister's volleyball and basketball games. She also didn't really watch sports or attend sporting events with her friends.

At the time of this study, Robbins was actively competing on a collegiate women's wheelchair basketball team and she was close to wrapping up her 5th year on the team. She talked about how she enjoys physical activity and also what types of physical activity she enjoyed participating in along with playing wheelchair basketball. This was apparent when she said,

Well I like wheelchair basketball the most because I've been playing it the longest and because I understand the game of basketball the best and I think that's why I enjoy it the most and also the people I play with like that makes it a lot of fun. I really like cardio workouts like I like the rowing machine and I really like going walking like down by the river and stuff and I don't know if that's really like cardio because it's not really fast-paced, but just cause I don't know I feel like I'm burning calories and as a girl I just like that feel [laughs]. Then I mean I like weight lifting because it's always nice when you've like weight lifted a while and then you're like oh look my arms look so cut so I think probably one of my main motivations is how my body is going to look after I workout more so than like the endorphins or something that's released from exercising although that's a good thing too. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Robbins said she enjoys both individualized physical activity as well as group involved physical activity, just depending on what her goal is.

Robbins had been playing sports for 10 years and when asked how she got her start in playing sports she said,

I went to a camp for kids with disabilities when I was like 13 and there was a bunch of kids there that played on the local like junior's wheelchair basketball team and they saw me and they were like "hey you should come play with us" and like I had seen my sister play basketball and stuff and I really wanted to play basketball so I was like ok so then I came and then got hooked. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Robbins came to the university in order to play on the women's wheelchair basketball team.

When asked how she heard of the university and the team she responded,

Larry came up to me at Women's National when I was a junior in high school and he told me that he was the coach for the university and he really wanted to me to come down and check it out because he was interested in me playing for him. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Robbins also informed the researcher she was on scholarship to play wheelchair basketball for the university.

At the time of the study, Robbins was less than 2 months from graduating so clearly she was going to continue to play sports until graduation. The researcher asked her if she was going to continue to play sports after graduation and she said she would recreationally. When asked to describe what she meant by recreationally, Robbins responded,

Like um like recreationally as far as just for fun like I wouldn't necessarily have a goal and it probably wouldn't be as intense it would probably just be like for my own gratification just so that I could like de-stress from something just to like it would be more to like have fun and not necessarily to reach a goal of like winning a national championship or something like that. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

After graduation Robbins was planning on moving back home and she mentioned that there was a local men's team near her house that she may try to play with and that she would like to spend more time swimming.

Reed

Reed is a Caucasian male in his early 20s. At the time of this study, Reed was in his first year of his undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where he was majoring in Biology, but had recently changed it to Accounting. Reed does not walk and he uses an everyday wheelchair.

Reed grew up in the East North Central division of the Midwest region of the United States where he attended private school from kindergarten through 12th grade. When asked to explain his physical disability he said, "it's uh paraplegia and it's because I had a spinal cord stroke" (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10). Reed's disability was acquired and he said that he had a

tumor when he was 3 and then it re-grew 4 years prior to this study. When it re-grew is when he became a paraplegic.

Reed grew up with his mother, father, and two older brothers and he considers his family “very close” (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10) and involved in each other’s lives. None of his family members has a disability. When asked about activities he remembers doing when he was younger, the main thing he remembered was playing soccer. With his friends he said they would do “I guess just like basic stuff you know like movies, hangout, sports you know and we still do that” (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10). Reed also said that he would watch sports on television as well as attend sporting events with both his family and his friends.

At the time of this study, Reed was actively competing on a collegiate men’s wheelchair basketball team as well as participating in physical activity outside of wheelchair basketball practice. Reed said that he enjoyed being physically active and described what types of activities he enjoys as well as why by stating,

Mostly any sports and I guess I like them because I’m just competitive and I think they’re fun. I like all sports. Basketball mostly like if I’m going to play then basketball’s my favorite, but if I’m watching then I’d say football is my favorite. (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10)

Reed also talked about how he enjoyed physical activity besides playing sports such as cardio and weight lifting. He said he just enjoys being active.

Reed began participating in sports at a very young age, but he was uncertain of the exact age he began. He began by playing soccer for a recreational center. He credits both his parents and his brothers for getting him started in soccer which he described this way:

Yeah I guess it was my parents and my brothers. I mean both of my brothers played it so I guess that was an influence, but I know my parents probably are the ones who got them started in it so ultimately I think it was both, but since my brothers played it, I played it I guess. (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10)

Reed came to the university in order to play on the men's wheelchair basketball team. When asked how he heard about this university he said, "I was recruited by Mickey, my coach, to come here to play" (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10). Although sport was the primary reason for coming to this university, Reed also said that he had family located in the same state as the university.

Reed said that he would continue to play on the men's wheelchair basketball team until he graduated. Since, at this time, he was only in his freshman year he wasn't sure about when he would graduate; however, he did say that he would probably go all 5 years for his eligibility. When the researcher asked Reed if he planned to continue to play sports after he graduates he responded with, "yeah I think I'll stay active for sure" (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10).

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a Caucasian female in her early 20s. As the time of this study, Elizabeth was in her second year of her undergraduate degree at a university located in the Southeastern United States where she was majoring in Political Science and working toward a Human Development minor. She chose this major and minor because she plans to attend law school after completing her undergraduate degree. Elizabeth can walk, but she typically uses an everyday wheelchair.

Elizabeth grew up in the Mid-Atlantic division of the Northeast region of the United States where she attended public schools from kindergarten through eighth grade and then a private school for high school. When asked exactly what her disability is, Elizabeth described by saying, "it's called osteogenesis imperfecta and in layman's terms it's frail bones" (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10). Osteogenesis imperfecta is a rare congenital disability which is usually inherited, but with Elizabeth it was just an abnormality. When the researcher asked her how it was discovered she replied,

When I was born like my arm they noticed, like the doctor noticed I wasn't moving it so he ordered an x-ray and they found like a bunch of broken bones like so they assumed and they can do a test so they did the test. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

After the test, Elizabeth's aunt is a doctor and she did some research and then Elizabeth began seeing an orthopedic specialist. As a young child she used crutches and walker, but when she was 4½, before starting kindergarten, she started using an everyday wheelchair.

Elizabeth grew up with her mother, father, and younger sister and she considers her family to be "pretty close" (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10) and involved with each other's lives. The researcher asked her if any of her family members had a disability and she said that her father has Parkinson's disease.

Elizabeth spent time going over activities she did with her family growing up by stating,

We do a lot of like game nights cause we're dorky like that and uh [pauses] I don't know sometimes we'll cook together. And my dad's a big hiker so we used to like hike together like on accessible trails and stuff like that. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

As evidenced through her answer, Elizabeth spent time actively with her family. The researcher asked her what kinds of activities she remembered doing with her friends to which she said, "uh like we usually go to the movies or shopping or just hanging out" (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10). The researcher and Elizabeth also spent time talking about whether she grew up watching sports on television or going to sporting events with either her family or friends. Elizabeth said that she did not because she does not like to watch sports. She sometimes went to watch her friends play sports in high school and she does attend college football games now with her friends.

At the time of this study, Elizabeth was actively participating on a collegiate women's wheelchair basketball team as well as participating in physical activity outside of wheelchair basketball practice. When asked to describe what types of physical activity she enjoys, she stated,

Well I play wheelchair basketball. I do that and I like that . . . its fun I guess and then I like used to do more sports but I don't do them anymore. Like I used to do swimming and track and like those were fun ya know like I like being active I guess. Like swimming for fun and like if I don't work for a while 'cause we don't have practice or something I'll like hand cycle. Like I've hand cycled up there [points upstairs at the university recreation center] and I like that. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

Elizabeth started playing sports at a very young age, around the age of 5 with track. She explained:

Oh God I started track when I was 5 which is absurd like I was like this big [motioned a small amount with her fingers] and then like actually my first track chair it's like a really funny story. They were looking for a track chair for me and they like couldn't find one small enough and they went to like an EXPO and the model, like they had a little model to show like the people the track chair, they bought me the model and it fit me. So, for like my first 2 years of track I used like a little model show what a track chair is supposed to look like. It was like this big [motioned her hands a little wider than shoulder length apart] and like they let us keep it cause no one else has ever fit in it before. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

When asked how she got her start in playing sports, she said,

We heard like this girl who has the same disability as me like we went to the same doctor and she was doing sports and she told my mom about it so like my mom took me. Like I was 5 so I don't know how much influence I had over it, but it's good for my bone health like to be active. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

Elizabeth came to the university in order to play on the women's wheelchair basketball team. When asked how she heard of the university and the team she said, " Well like I did junior wheelchair basketball so like everyone kind of knows what the colleges were that had teams and like I talked to Larry my junior year of high school I guess" (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10).

When the researcher and Elizabeth talked about her coming to college at the university, she said that she would not have come to the university if it were not for the wheelchair basketball team.

At the time of this study, Elizabeth was on scholarship, but it was academic and not for basketball.

At the time of the study, Elizabeth was in her second year of college and she said she would graduate after 2 more years. Elizabeth said that she planned on continuing playing sports until she graduated, but when asked about continuing to play sports after graduation she responded with, “I mean we’ll just see where I am in my life. Like see how everything’s going . . . I don’t know” (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10). Although she was not sure about continuing to play sports after graduation she said that she would stay physically active because she does not consider herself a naturally lazy person and could not see herself just sitting around.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

The data sources in this study were two semi-structured interviews with each participant as well as two different focus group interviews. The questions were guided by symbolic interactionism theory, which asserts that phenomena are given meaning through experiences. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized in order to address the meaning these college wheelchair athletes have assigned to their physical education experiences.

The information gathered from the data sources was compiled and then five themes, based on the participants' reflections on their physical education experiences, were drawn. As the themes were identified, each theme was individually validated with corresponding evidence in other data sources. For example, if a theme was noted when reviewing a participant's individual interview transcript, then the researcher attempted to find further evidence of that theme among other individual interview transcripts and both the focus group transcripts. The themes were checked with the participants for validation and comments.

The findings of this study, only specific to this group of college wheelchair athletes, have been summarized into five themes: (a) the participants felt they were included in physical education, but not equally and meaningfully; (b) physical fitness testing was the most remembered physical education experience; (c) the participants' sporting experiences were recognized by the school; (d) overall the participants' physical education experiences were enjoyable; and (e) the participants have suggestions for physical educators on including

individuals with disabilities in physical education. Also, within four of these overall themes, several sub-themes emerged.

Included, but not Equally and Meaningfully

Throughout this study, the participants described activities they participated in during physical education as well as activities that they did not participate in. Sometimes this was by their choice, but more often than not, they were just not included. Even when included, often the participants felt like this inclusion was not equal to their nondisabled peers and the experiences were not meaningful to them. However, a few of the participants gave examples in which they knew they were not included equally, but the alternative activity they were given was more meaningful to them than if they had been included equally with the rest of their class.

When asked whether he thought he included equally and meaningfully in his physical education experiences, Mark stated,

Equally not quite so well most things yeah, but there were some things that I just kind of sat on the side and watched. Meaningfully also kind of the same, the things that I really couldn't do I was kind of separated from the rest of the group and I could watch them and that kind of stuff you know and I also kind of served as like his helper type thing like he always included me in activities whether it was keeping score or being a referee like he always involved me somehow, but it wasn't always in the way I wanted him to because I was real competitive. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Meredith also discussed how she was not included equally and meaningful because sometimes they did not plan activities she could do. She described this when she said, "I mean I had the option to try and participate in whatever, but I guess it wasn't really equal or meaningful because um they didn't really plan activities that I could do" (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10).

During Lexie's interview she made it very clear that she did not feel included in physical education equally and meaningfully and when she came to the focus group interview, her artifact

spoke volumes. When asked to describe her artifact and how it represented her physical education experiences, Lexie responded,

I brought a strap because I felt like I was held back. It felt like I was just being “included” for the sake of inclusion, but not being included meaningfully. Like until track no one really saw that I had any athletic ability so I didn’t really like gym until I got older. I wasn’t challenged or pushed at all. (Focus Group A, Lexie, 4/28/10)

Three different sub-themes emerged within this theme: (a) accessibility, (b) participation choices and modifications, and (c) unsure who to blame.

Accessibility

The first sub-theme that emerged within this theme was accessibility. When asked if the school she attended had to change or adapt anything for her to be able to participate in physical education, Meredith stated,

I remember in like kindergarten or first grade, there was a big hill we had to get up to go to the soccer field where I would play full time goalie and at that point I couldn’t get myself completely up the hill, like I would get stuck at the top and I remember being stuck at the top for like maybe 5 or 10 minutes I don’t know but I was just kind of hanging there like hoping somebody could kind of see me because they totally forgot me. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Lexie had a similar complaint about when her class would go the weight room. She said, “there was a weight lifting room in the basement, granted there was no ramp or elevator or anything, so I had to lug my walker up and down the stairs” (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

Meredith also had another accessibility issue arise in middle school when the researcher asked her if she had to dress out for physical education class. She responded.

I stopped doing that then really. Like I would just wear in clothes that day that I could workout or exercise in a little bit but I didn’t change cause the locker rooms were actually not accessible and so I couldn’t get down to them. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Elizabeth also mentioned that accessibility sometimes kept her from participating equally and meaningfully in physical education. She recalled that “outside stuff was hard, like on the grass cause it’s hard to push on grass and participate at the same time” (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10).

Participation Choices and Modifications

The second sub-theme identified within the data was that the choices of activities and participation the participants had or did not have, as well as modification, played a factor in whether the participants felt they were included equally and meaningfully. For example, when Fred’s class went outside and he couldn’t do something they were going to do, he just did his own thing. He said,

Yeah, I would either you know, I’d have the key and I’d get in the gym or I’d go shoot baskets or I’d go lift weights or I’d go you know hit baseballs in like the indoor batting cage, you know, like I’d do something. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Robbins was allowed to count her playing wheelchair basketball outside of school as her physical education credit in high school. Although this did not bother her, she did feel like the school made this choice because it was the easiest way to handle the “situation.” She described this in her interview:

It was the easiest like as far as . . . like I think it was easy for them and I just didn’t like, I just didn’t really see a point in trying to participate with them especially since it was like stand-up basketball so there’s like no point I’m just going to like run over their toes and people are like I’m going to get annoyed with them and they’re going to get annoyed with me. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Several of the participants talked about modifications their physical education teachers made, but also about ones they think could or should have been made for them to participate equally and meaningfully. For example, Justin said,

If we played baseball I had a runner until I got to first. So I would hit he would run and then I would take over. And in dodge ball I had to be hit in the body the chair didn’t count but usually I would catch the ball and then give it to someone else to throw. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

Several other participants mentioned having designated runners during one of the focus group interview sessions. Mark said, “When we played kickball, I had a designated runner and that kind of thing” (Focus Group A, Mark, 4/28/10) and he also got to pick who his designated runner was. In response to this, Elizabeth mentioned, “Yeah, I had a designated runner too, when we played softball” (Focus Group A, Elizabeth, 4/28/10). Elizabeth’s designated runner was just whoever was next to her in line. Lexie, too, had a designated runner in physical education, but when asked if she got to pick hers she replied, “No, it was usually a volunteer and usually the slowest person in the class would volunteer” (Focus Group A, Lexie, 4/28/10).

When modifications were not made in physical education, the participants felt they had not been included equally and meaningfully. Elizabeth talked about how she wasn’t able to participate in field day in physical education since modifications were not made to the activities. She described this experience:

Well, I remember there was always field day and like field day was really hard for me and it was like sad cause field day is always like a big deal and I couldn’t like do field day. I mean I could do it, but there were only like one or two things I could do and it was like teams and I never wanted to be like really slow ‘cause they timed you so like they said I could have gone, but I didn’t really like wanna go because like you know how like little boys are and it’s like field day so I would just like sit out. Like and they would do like sack races and I couldn’t do a sack race and they would do like other stuff I couldn’t do. I could do some of the stuff, but like I remember I had to sit out for most. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

Unsure Who to Blame

The third and final sub-theme that emerged within this theme was that the participants were unsure where to assign blame for not being included equally and meaningfully. In one reflection, a participant distinctly remembered two of her physical education teachers not wanting to allow her to participate. Callie stated,

One coach we got like wouldn’t let me practice or wouldn’t let me play and he just kind of sat me there and so our athletic director, who had been with me since I was in like in

first grade, came and talked to him and then we had another coach, who was my softball coach, and she wouldn't let me practice or play and she refused to change and so she got fired. (Callie, Interview, 3/23/10)

Meredith blamed the curriculum more so than the physical educators. She talked about how her physical education teachers did not really plan activities she could do and when the researcher asked her why she thought they did not, she responded,

I think it was just the curriculum they were used to. Like a lot of stuff, I was kind of a surprise coming up through the schools it was more about "oh now we need chair lifts, we need to make sure the elevator works, we need to figure out fire drills" instead. So I mean, they changed what was easy to change or what was really necessary, but they didn't really change a whole lot. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

The administrators at Elizabeth's school did not want her to participate in physical education at all, but her parents talked with them and then the administrators decided to let her participate. She remembered the following about her physical education teacher:

[She was] always really apologetic about it. Like you know she would say "I think you should be allowed to participate and do everything" and then she was always like really good about it. But, the one thing she used to say like she had this one comment like "you know when you get to middle school they're not going to do this for you" and that was like her big thing like she thought she was being like really nice or something. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

Lexie mentioned that in middle school she would "give them credit that they made a valiant effort to include me and well I remember not gym class being so much adapted, but my track practice was adapted for me a little bit" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

Physical Fitness Testing

The second overall theme to emerge within the data was that physical fitness testing was the most remembered and talked about physical education experience. Only 2 of the 10 participants did not have physical fitness testing and 1 of those 2 was never required to take physical education. Not only was it talked about in-depth in 8 of the 10 individual participant physical education experiences interview, it was also brought up and talked about in both focus

group interviews. Fred's artifact was a Presidential Fitness Award blue patch because "that's what I remember most about able-bodied physical education and I won the blue patch every year" (Focus Group A, Fred, 4/28/10).

Three different sub-themes emerged within this theme: (a) positive reflections on physical fitness testing, (b) negative reflections on physical fitness testing, and (c) modifications during physical fitness testing.

Positive Reflections on Physical Fitness Testing

The first sub-theme to emerge within this theme was that some participants had very positive reflections of physical fitness testing in their physical education experiences. For example, Elizabeth's artifact represented her positive feelings toward physical fitness testing.

Here's how she described what she brought to the focus group interview and why:

I made a representation of a certificate I got that's at home. I was the v sit-n-reach champion and record holder in elementary school and middle school. I am practically made for it because my legs are really small and my arms are long. I still have the record, it was like 17 inches or something like that. It's on the wall at the school with my name and the date I set it. (Focus Group A, Elizabeth, 4/28/10)

Callie was confused because she was one of the two participants who did not have physical fitness testing in her physical education, so she asked Elizabeth to explain. Elizabeth got out of her chair and demonstrated for Callie and also said, "This was like my moment in physical education" (Focus Group A, Elizabeth, 4/28/10).

Meredith was also good at the v sit-n-reach and had a positive reflection toward physical fitness testing because of this. She said, "I like the v sit-in-reach because I could get it like passed the scale, so I just did that one for fun [laughing]" (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10). She also mentioned again in the focus group interview that she "got it off the scale" (Focus Group B, Meredith, 4/28/10). When talking about physical fitness testing in her physical education

experiences, Lexie said, “My favorite thing was well I liked the part of the fitness tests where we could do the pull ups because I was always relatively decent at that” (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

Negative Reflections on Physical Fitness Testing

The second sub-theme to emerge was that some participants had very negative reflections of physical fitness testing in their physical education experiences. Two of the participants that had positive experiences also mentioned negative experiences they had, both involving the “mile run.” Elizabeth talked about her negative feelings when she stated,

I used to do track so I could like do the mile like in my track chair, but they wouldn't take my mile time from my track chair like they made me do it like on a track with a like, like I was in my day chair and I was really slow. So like I remember like my mile time in my track chair was like really good like I would have gotten like the gold or whatever the heck the highest was, but um like they wouldn't take it. Like they said if I was gonna get the credit for it I would have to do it on the track with everybody else and in my day chair obviously I like would have like been the slowest and I was annoyed about that. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

She actually talked about this again when physical fitness testing was brought up in the focus group interview where she said,

I had to do the mile and they wouldn't let me count my time in my track chair because like it was like an assistive device so they said. So they made me do it in my everyday in a parking lot like around cones and I remember getting really dizzy. It was awful. (Focus Group A, Elizabeth, 4/28/10)

Lexie's negative reflection on physical fitness testing in physical education was also because of the mile run. She “had to do it with the walker and on a dirt track” (Focus Group Interview A, Lexie, 4/28/10). However, it was adapted for her. She explained this when she said, “I only had to do like a couple of laps and I remember hating it anyway because of the dirt track” (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10). Reed's negative reflection on physical fitness testing was also seen when the researcher asked him what his least favorite thing in physical education was and he

answered, “My least favorite thing in all of physical education was by far the fitness testing” (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10).

Modifications During Physical Fitness Testing

The third sub-theme that emerged was the modifications, if any, the participants remembered from their physical fitness testing. For example, several of the participants did not have their physical fitness testing modified, instead they just did not have to do it. Fred, who had such positive reflections on physical testing before his injury, did not participate in physical fitness testing once he returned to school after his injury. When the researcher asked if there was physical fitness testing in high school, Fred responded,

My senior year when they were doing physical fitness I was probably skipping school [laughs]. To be honest with you when they did physical fitness testing or like when they'd go down to the field our coach would be like “if you want to go to Hardee's and get something to eat” or if it was pouring down rain and we were outside or if it was muddy out because it had been pouring down rain they'd be like “if you don't feel like pushing around in this stuff dude you're here like you're here on my thing, you've attended” [laughs]. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

When the researcher asked Reed if his physical education teachers modified the physical fitness testing after he became paraplegic he said the mile run was, but when the researcher asked him how they adapted it he said, “Well, no, I just didn't have to do it actually” (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10). Meredith's mile run was adapted which she explained when she said, “The mile run was part of it and they all went in the grass and I did mine in the gym” (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10). Mark talked about his physical fitness experience by stating,

I did the crunches and whatever else I could. Like the mile time, I didn't do the mile until fifth grade when I got the wheelchair and we had like a black top like it was like eight laps so it was like an eighth of a mile track and I pushed when I was in fifth grade and that was the first time since first grade that I'd run it. 'Cause I ran it in first grade because that was before I started showing symptoms and then I pushed it in fifth grade but the pull up test and like pushups and sit ups and stuff oh and the sit-n-reach, all that stuff I did. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

The researcher asked Justin if he has physical fitness testing to which he responded,

I had to bench, curl and do pull ups. I don't remember how much I had to go up but I had to go up a lot. I did fifty pull ups in a row in high school. Also the mile was broken up into three groups: the athletes, average, and overweight. I was in the average group and won my mile. I even beat some of the athletes. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

When the researcher asked Justin if any of the fitness testing was actually adapted for him, he said, "Yeah, I had to do more pulls ups and stuff since I could do those. But I guess not really anything else, or not that I remember" (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10).

Recognition of Sporting Experiences

Although physical education is not directly about sport participation there is a relationship between the two. With college wheelchair athletes as the participants in this study, it did not surprise the researcher that one of the overarching themes found in the data was about sport participation. The third theme identified was that the participants' sporting experiences were recognized by the school. In fact, Alex brought his artifact to demonstrate this point:

Mine's a little different because I got injured later, but it's a picture of me signing at this university because it was in the paper and I guess you know that's [points at picture] my coach standing behind me and you know how I said my coaches were a big influence in my life. So, my signing was at the school and I went to a small school so they made a really big deal out of it. (Focus Group B, Alex, 4/28/10)

When Alex talked about his signing in the focus group interview, the researcher prompted the rest of the group asking them if they had anything similar happen in their schools. Robbins replied, "I remember at our sports banquet at the end of the year I got like 'Athlete of the Year' my senior year because I was the only one that was going to college for athletics" (Focus Group B, Robbins, 4/28/10).

When the researcher asked Justin if he was invited to any sports banquets at his school he said,

Yes and I didn't even know they were going to so I didn't show up. Coach Jones was the basketball coach and made a speech about me. Also, my vice principal used to ask kids who the best basketball player was at the school and we had a girl go to Notre Dame for basketball and he said me all the time. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

When the researcher asked the participants if their schools were aware of what they were doing outside of school sporting-wise, most of them thought so. Elizabeth said, "There was an article about my team and they like posted it" (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10). Fred said everyone knew what he did and explained,

We did exhibitions like against a college nearby. When we did that my senior year we had, I think like, almost my whole graduating class came so we had about 1,500 people in my graduating class so I guess it was like 1,200 of them came. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Three different sub-themes emerged within this theme: (a) included on school sports teams; (b) involved, but not included on school sports teams; and (c) schools were curious about wheelchair basketball.

Included on School Sports Teams

The first sub-theme that emerged within this theme was that some of the participants were included on school sports teams. Of all 10 participants, 1 in particular had a very different physical education and sport experience, and that was Callie. She actually tried out for her middle school sports teams in the 6th grade and played all the way through 12th grade. When the researcher asked Callie what sports she played for the school she said, "I did softball, basketball, and track so I did all three that they offered" (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10).

Elizabeth also participated on her school's track team. This is how she described that experience:

I did track like for the school. Well like the thing was they didn't have a track so they practiced at like a park so I couldn't practice with them every day and like once a week they would get a track and I would practice with them on the day they had the track. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

The researcher asked if she competed against other high schools to which she replied,

I went to a few meets and it was really terrible because they wouldn't let me race with the other kids 'cause they were worried I would hit them so they would like put me in a race by myself like it was like really stupid 'cause like there's no point in racing by myself. But, I mean if there was a picture I was in it . . . like even after I stopped going to meets they still would put me in the picture with them because I still practiced with them once a week so they still considered me like part of the team. I mean we had hardly anyone so really they would consider anyone part of the team. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

Lexie was on her school's track team as well and when the researcher talked about this experience and competing against able-bodied students she said, "I mean I competed against them, but I always came in last so I called it competing against myself [laughs]" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10).

Although she competed against herself, Lexie was glad she participated on the track team because she thought it helped both students and teachers view her as someone with athletic ability and athletic potential. Justin tried track in middle school, as part of an able-bodied team, but he did not like track so he did not continue his participation. Justin had a choice of different sports to participate in, but decided they were not for him:

They let me if I wanted and this was with the able bodied team. I also was approached by the high school tennis coach and he knew the rules for me and wanted me to play, but it also wasn't for me. I need contact in the sport I am playing. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

Involved, but not Included on School Sports Teams

The second sub-theme to emerge within this data was that some of the participants were involved with the sports teams but did not actually play. For example, Robbins informed the researcher that while in high school she traveled with the girls' volleyball and basketball teams to help keep stats. When the researcher asked her how that began; she said,

Just because like it was such a small school and like pretty much all the girls would play volleyball and basketball and I was friends with all of them and so like I would end up going to the games and stuff anyway so they were like "Hey why don't you just come and we can give you stuff to do that way it's not like you, that like that way you can go

and you can feel like you're part of it" and not like okay I'm just coming and I'm sitting here cheering. (Interview, Robbins, 3/24/10)

Mark had a similar situation at his high school that he explained during his interview:

Once my school learned that I played basketball they all wanted me to get involved so I was the assistant coach of the women's, the girls varsity basketball team my freshman year so I went to all the practices and I helped. I was the shooting coach and I worked with the fitness because for some reason I work with foot work pretty well . . . figure that one out [laughs] but yeah. And then my junior and senior year I was the assistant coach for the freshman boys team and then I also, when it didn't conflict with my basketball, I was the assistant coach with the varsity also, but that was on the weekends usually so a lot of time I was gone. But, again I attended every practice and I dressed out in the practice uniform and I was throwing outlet passes and I was the shooting coach the defense coach. Like I had my whistle and my clipboard and my play book like I had it all, I was a legit coach. That was sweet. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Alex didn't serve in a coaching role, but since he had been on the school teams prior to his injury when he came back to school he still "traveled to every football game and traveled to every basketball game" (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10) but he wasn't interactive as far as playing with them. It was more about hanging out with the coaches and his friends. When Fred came back to school after his injury, the coaches tried to get him to stay involved with the teams.

They did ask me to be like the manager for the basketball team and like for the golf team they asked me to go on trips and kind of sit around and help coach on the golf course, but I was like nope I got other things to do. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Schools Were Curious About Wheelchair Basketball

The third and final sub-theme that emerged within this theme was that the participants' schools were curious about wheelchair basketball. This sub-theme emerged in different ways in the data. Meredith showed this in her interview.

I think it was in like fourth grade . . . they brought in a bunch of wheelchairs one day, I forgot about this, they had people do like obstacle courses and wheelchair basketball and stuff. I think they only did that 'cause I was there. I completely forgot about that until now. They had them for like a week. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

For Justin, he got to actually play wheelchair basketball at his school.

I remember my school hosting a tournament for my wheelchair basketball team. They would give us the gym for free and even once when I was a senior the school board tried to charge us to use the gym and the principal wouldn't let that happen, arguing that they don't charge the other basketball players to play. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

He also remembered,

My senior year the championship game most of my friends came to the tournament and watched that game and my friends made it crazy and when I was drinking a water bottle I threw it to them as a joke and that was fun [laughs]. I'm not really sure why I remember that part. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

When talking about adapting equipment in his physical education class, Fred recalled an experience he had while in high school:

I remember we did an exhibition and after we did the exhibition my coach asked if we could bring the chairs at least once a week for the stand up team to play in and I would get to really participate in that because I would bring my sports chair so he like adapted the class around me a little bit. But other than that like I'd lift free weights so I didn't really need any adaptations, but he would help me spot and like he was actually the first person who put a weight belt around me like you know a weight lifters belt like when we were doing bench press because I would lose my balance. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Physical Education was Enjoyable

Despite the fact most of the participants in this study felt they were not included equally and meaningfully in physical education, their reflections on physical education experiences still showed they genuinely thought physical education was an enjoyable experience. There were multiple reasons for this enjoyment such as relationships they made, activities they participated in, or sporting experiences and opportunities they had.

When Callie reflected on her physical education experiences she noted, "They were pretty average I guess" (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10). During the interview with Callie, she and the researcher discussed the impact of her disability in relation to her physical education and sporting experiences.

I don't think my disability really impacted me in my physical education experiences because everyone just knew me and well . . . but there were a few times in high school

sports and such where it kind of caused an issue, but not in PE. (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10)

This quote intrigued the researcher, so she asked Callie to explain what she meant.

In softball one year they were trying to accuse me, well a girl slid into the catcher when the catcher had the fair play on the plate so it was the runner's fault and she got injured and they tried to say I was the catcher and that's why she got injured because of my leg when there was a picture in the paper where the catcher clearly wasn't me and I was the first baseman. And then there was another time um when a ref wasn't going to let me play because he thought it was "illegal" equipment, but the other team's coach just agreed to it and stuff like that. (Interview, Callie, 3/23/10)

Despite not really being included to participate with her classes, Meredith enjoyed physical education as well. When asked what she remembered the most she said, "Having the run of the gym, just shooting baskets while no one was in there" (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10). The researcher was actually surprised by this because being in the gym alone shooting baskets meant that Meredith had not been included, but Meredith also said this was her favorite thing about physical education in high school.

In Justin's reflections on physical education experiences, he talked about an enjoyable experience from his elementary physical education specifically.

I remember not being picked last when we played a sport in gym. You would think that a kid in a wheelchair would always be picked last, but I never was and that meant a lot to me. When I got to high school, I even got picked higher once I got stronger. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

Justin also mentioned that he had "never been turned down to play anything in gym at any grade level. I was always asked, but only on a few occasions did I turn it down" (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10).

Another participant who enjoyed his physical education experiences was Mark. Mark only participated in physical education in elementary and middle school and this was how he reflected on his physical education experiences:

I mean like I had a great educational experience all through you know from kindergarten all the way up through high school as far as PE goes with the exception of high school I mean like that was kind of a bummer but I still got physical activity in whether it was in the backyard with my brother or what. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Some of the conversations in the focus group interviews also indicated that the participants enjoyed specific activities within their physical education experiences. The following is an excerpt taken from one of the focus group interviews:

Reed: For my artifact I brought a picture from the movie, Dodge Ball, because um in PE I remember playing dodge ball and loving it.

Justin: Was this before or after you were paralyzed?

Reed: Before. Well before and then after, I still loved playing.

Researcher: So this was a positive and enjoyable experience for you in physical education?

Reed: Yeah I loved playing dodge ball.

Researcher: Did anyone else enjoy playing dodge ball or have experience playing dodge ball?

Justin: I loved it, but I couldn't throw very hard . . . but I loved it.

Alex: I loved it too, I was the coach's aide though after I got injured so I played with all the kids that didn't do athletics or anything so they didn't really care about PE you know, but it was still fun. (Focus Group B, 4/28/10)

Two different sub-themes emerged within this theme: (a) relationships with teachers and students were positive and (b) different responses before and after injuries.

Relationships with Teachers and Students Were Positive

The first sub-theme that emerged within the data was that the participants felt the teachers and students responded positively to their disabilities. When the researcher talked with Justin about how the teachers and students responded to him, he had different responses. For his teachers he said, "Every teacher I had was always nervous at first, but warmed up real quick"

(Interview, Justin, 3/15/10). As for the students, he let his artifact describe a moment which made him feel truly accepted among his peers.

I brought a picture of a park bench because I couldn't bring one in here . . . I tried, it didn't work [everyone laughs] because in the fourth grade and it was my first week of school and I had no friends because I had just moved to a new school so it was awful, sad I know . . . and we went and played in gym class and I went to catch a football and I flipped over a park bench, like in my wheelchair and you know dominated, right [laughs]? And they brought my chair back to me and I just got back in and kept playing and really and truly from that point I was involved in physical education with my friends. (Focus Group B, 4/28/10)

When asked if any students or teachers responded differently toward him after he returned to school Reed said, "No they acted the same, but they knew the situation and they knew me" (Interview, Reed, 3/27/10). The researcher asked Meredith how the students responded to her when she chose to participate in activities, to which she responded,

I think it was always cool with them if I tried because they knew I wouldn't like try and do something that would totally screw everything up you know like if I was like trying to play floor hockey up with them and stuff they would probably just end up falling on me or something like that so I could play goalie and all that so that's what I did. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Meredith also thought her teachers all responded to her well, but this was due to the fact they let her do whatever she wanted.

Mark thought his both his physical education teacher and principal were supportive of him even though he believes at first they were not sure what to do with him. He actually developed more of a friendship with his physical education teacher. Mark described this in his interview when he stated,

Yeah he was really good like looking back now and knowing what I know I could tell he was doing everything he could to try and get me involved and he also really I think the biggest thing he did for me more even more important than getting me involved later in like my in the elementary grades was he really helped me develop a sense of like a positive attitude. He helped me out more on the mental aspect of it all and like he was positive about life and telling me to think good thoughts and try my hardest and that kind of stuff and that's really what stuck with me more than the activities and stuff like that. I

still talk to him today, like when I go home we have coffee and stuff like that. He's a great guy like I know his family you know we're really good friends. I mean like he helped me more with like dealing with it emotionally like at school he was kind of like my outlet like I know I could always go in his office or knock on his door and be like look I'm having a bad day and he would always find some way to at least make me feel better. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

He also talked about his teachers doing a good job of adapting activities for him and how they truly wanted him to get the most out of his physical education experience.

My teachers were real good about like you know at the beginning of the year like my folks were really involved like I couldn't have asked for any better like as far as making sure I got the most out of my educational experience my folks were great. My mom being a teacher, she's a special education teacher too, so she knew all the loop holes and she knew all the rules and so like they were really good about like before I even like I had IEP meetings like 6 weeks before school even started with all my teachers and you know like my mom hand-picked all my teachers and so like everyone knew it was kind of like from sixth grade on it was an understanding, especially in PE, you tell me what you can do and what you need and I'll give it to you so that you can participate so that's what I had. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Alex was in athletics prior to his injury and when he returned to school he continued to stay in athletics, but instead of participating he said he hung out more with the coaches. The researcher asked him if he wanted to, would he have been allowed to participate in athletics to which he responded,

I don't really know if they knew what to do. It's also, well I don't know if this was like . . . well uh it's also somewhat of a different situation because I was really close with all my coaches so they knew I wanted to stay in that atmosphere with the camaraderie and everything and so they didn't at all like pressure me by saying like "well you need to go to PE" or do anything like that because I think they all understood that you know it was a big part of my life and I wanted to continue it that way but you know none of it was interactive like I didn't play well wait I'll take that back you know I did lift with them. I lifted with them, but it was it wasn't like alright "Alex you can come in here and lift" it was just like my own preference. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

The researcher then asked him if he felt like they would have adapted things for him, now looking back. Alex said,

Well . . . [laughs] I'm trying to say this without sounding cocky or anything, but like they may have done it like they may have like made a special amends but I'm not sure if they

would have done it under any other circumstances if that makes sense. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Different Responses Before and After Injuries

The second sub-theme that emerged within the data was the participants with acquired disabilities and who experienced physical education with and without a disability had different responses and feelings before and after their injuries. Three different participants reflected openly about changes after they acquired their disabilities. Mark was one participant who talked about how the students responded towards him after he started showing symptoms.

It was not like I was young like second or third grade so I got a lot of questions that I didn't know how to answer and it was hard for me because I didn't know what was wrong with me yet because it was that transition period where we didn't know 'cause I was misdiagnosed so many times so it was hard because I couldn't really tell them what was wrong 'cause we didn't know um but I think the most important thing I did was at the start of third grade like we or I sat down in front of my class in PE with my disability advocate and we spent like an hour and a half and we just kind of talked about what was going on with me and all of my symptoms and what was going on in my life and that helped out a lot with kids understanding and I also had my group of friends at that time were awesome. Like I wouldn't have made it through grade school or junior high if it wasn't for my you know core group of friends and everyone else too, like really I didn't have many problems. (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10)

Alex got injured the summer before his junior year of high school. The researcher asked him if anything changed with how the students or teachers responded toward him, to which he responded,

You know maybe like subconsciously but as far as like purposely I don't think anything was on purpose. I personally noticed some changes as far as the ways people acted towards me but I think it was just kind of like an adaptation for them not being in that situation before so if they way they treated me differently may have been like subconsciously as opposed to like purposely and including me or excluding me that stuff. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

He mentioned that his least favorite thing about athletics after he was injured was more because of the feeling he had of missing out rather than the actually experiences in class.

My least favorite was when we went to state my junior year. That football season we went to state and we had just athletes galore in the class above me and my class had pretty good athletes also but um least favorite moment would be whenever we lost the state championship game because I was planning on coming in and playing quite a bit you know I was on the depth chart on offense and defense and you know emotionally that took a toll on me, but it was all right. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10)

Looking back on his physical education experiences after his injury, Alex thought more about his sporting experiences. He remembered being overwhelmed by the support he got from his school community.

I mean the town I come from, Grizzley, was overwhelmingly supportive they went above and beyond. They did multiple like fundraisers and what not. The football team usually does a fundraiser for their program and they sell these little cards with all these coupons for local businesses and that year that I got hurt all the proceeds that they got from that, instead of going towards the athletic program, they gave a portion of it to me which was like a pretty hearty portion, it was like I think like eight grand so I mean that and just people in the community they adapted my house for like almost free of charge. (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10).

Fred was also injured the summer before his junior year of high school. When the researcher asked Fred what he remembered most from his high school physical education when he returned to school, he responded,

I remember how different it is. Like the biggest thing that sticks out in my head is the difference in being like a varsity level athlete and that being a state qualifier you know I was 14th overall in the state in golf my sophomore year and runner up to Vince Carter for state in basketball my sophomore year in high school and I remember what it was like being very cocky and arrogant and being treated like a God and then coming to the realization that everybody's pretty much equal no matter how good you are athletically. I think like PE exploited that for me because there was a true difference in the way that people treated you and the way people reacted when you were around. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

The researcher asked Fred to elaborate what he meant by the difference.

I would say the difference was people look up to you like you're on a pedestal when I was able-bodied I felt like they looked up to me because I was on a pedestal but I felt like it was for all the wrong reasons because they were jealous, they wanted to be like me, they wanted to have athletic ability that sort of thing. Then after my accident I felt like people looked up to me and put me on a pedestal because I continued to push through things and continued to live, you know I mean, so when they looked at you it was just a

different look you would get and it was a different feeling when you would talk to somebody. (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10)

Although the fourth theme the researcher found in this study was about how the participants' reflections on physical education were genuinely enjoyable, it is important to note that one participant did not fit in this category. Lexie enjoyed some activities, but for the most part she did not find her physical education experiences pleasant. When the researcher asked Lexie to reflect back on why she felt her physical education experiences were unpleasant she stated,

Okay, well I distinctly remember getting pelted over and over again by balls and like any type of dodge ball or mat ball type game people would just like chunk the ball at me and be like "ewww" because I was an easy out. Like I don't blame the kids, but like it wasn't like they were thinking about the game and I was an easy out and like I distinctly remember like when we played those like I would be like you know how there's a line in like the middle [the researcher nodded yes] I would be as far back from the line as I possibly could and when we had to like run to the other side of the gym for things like to go free people a lot of time I remember my role because it would be like to distract people so I would just like start I would be like the decoy and other people would run to go like tag out but they would be like tagging me or I would be like a lot of times how I would participate would be I would be screaming like I'd be like "he's going, he's going" like really, really loud because like that was one of things I had going for me because I was a loud mouth so like a lot of the way I participated would be by screaming. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

Another unpleasant reflection Lexie discussed was her least favorite activities.

Group activities you know, and getting picked last all the time, like consistently and just not feeling like that people saw me, like I think they saw me as like a token and like kind of like the token and not as like a participatory member of the gym class. Like I was there and I was participating, but I don't think that when you think of athletic people in your class they didn't think of me. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

In relation to middle school physical education, Lexie reflected that she remembers feeling left out. She also said that she felt more included in high school physical education than elementary or middle school, but that she still did not think she was included equally and meaningfully in physical education. Lexie's reflections on her physical education experiences

were a prime example of how the conceptual framework, symbolic interactionism theory guided this study. Perceptions evolve as individuals define and redefine reality through social interactions (Solmon & Carter, 1995) and clearly Lexie defined a negative meaning towards her physical education experiences.

Suggestions for Change

The final theme that emerged from the data in this study was that the participants have suggestions for physical educators on including individuals with disabilities in physical education. One of these suggestions was that physical education teachers can do more to include students with disabilities in physical education classes. Physical educators can incorporate changes in their curriculums in a number of ways.

One example was when Meredith suggested using a form of reverse inclusion, meaning that she thought it would be beneficial for her physical education teachers to bring wheelchairs into physical education and have all the able-bodied students participate the way she does. This idea came to Meredith because it did happen once while she was in high school, but she only remembered it happening the one time (Meredith, 3/14/10).

Another way physical educators can make changes in their curriculums is to “think outside the box” (Lexie, 3/22/10) and come up with more activities and opportunities. Lexie believes her teachers could have done a lot more to include her in activities that didn’t make her feel so “left out” (Lexie, 3/22/10). She explains how she arrived at this suggestion by stating,

I hated it because I felt like I stuck out and I think there could have been a lot more done like now that like I’ve been around people that like are adaptive P.E. teachers and like um I’ve had conversations with people I am definitely like, man they could have done a lot more. (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10)

Another suggestion the participants had was to not assume individuals with physical disabilities want to be made to participate with someone else with a disability just because they

have one or that they want to be placed in a certain group in physical education. For example, Meredith discussed being excluded from the gym to participate in an activity with another student who had a physical disability:

There was one year where there was a girl with CP like a couple years ahead of me and you know she was a senior and I was actually in sixth grade so she was way ahead of me, but they let like they had her come into our gym class and they'd set like little bowling pins in the hallway like we wanted to be out there to bowl or something. I wasn't really asked about that one so I was kind of like okay, what's happening here? That happened on more than one occasion, not just with bowling. They also put some 5-foot baskets out there for us to shoot baskets so yeah I guess they just assumed that's what I wanted to do. (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10)

Elizabeth described how her physical education classes had students divided into three groups.

There was like a "caring and sharing" group, the "middle" group, and like the "advanced" group and like I always thought it was kind of ridiculous cause there was always all girls in the "caring and sharing" group and there was like, I mean I was always in the "caring and sharing" group because like I couldn't do anything they planned. (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10)

Elizabeth said that the groups were picked by the physical education teachers and that they would rotate groups on a yearly basis, but that was really just for the "middle" and "advanced" groups. The "caring and sharing" group was always run by the one female physical education teacher at the school. She also said, "like looking back, I always kind of thought that was ridiculous like cause middle schoolers have enough problems with self-esteem not being in the caring and sharing group . . ." (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10).

The last suggestion was that if physical education teachers make sure they include students with physical disabilities in physical education this could actually change how society views the abilities of individuals with disabilities. Justin pointed this out when he talked about being viewed as a participant in the Special Olympics just because he uses a wheelchair.

I wish people wouldn't assume that since I am in a wheelchair that I play in the Special Olympics. I think it's nice what they do for those people, but I am not slow and I think it's sad that more people want to help mentally disabled people because they feel bad for

them. Physically disabled people fall through the cracks of society. They are not able enough where people expect good things from the exceptional athletes, and not a charity case like the Special Olympics. It sounds wrong to say, but I have been paralyzed forever and when little kids ask their parents why I can't walk and the parents say "don't look at him," they grow up scared to look me in the eye. But, if I were slow they would explain to the child what is wrong. It's the fear of the unknown and I hope someday that we don't get looked over just because we can't stand up right, 'cause that is all it is. I had decent P.E. teachers, so I did not have a bad P.E. experience and maybe that's why I am where I am with sports, but some of my friends did have bad experiences. I think that if all P.E. teachers work to include physically disabled people in P.E. this could only help some assumptions change. If other students see that physically disabled people can participate like them in P.E. this could change how people view physically disabled people. They may no longer assume people like me play in the Special Olympics. (Interview, Justin, 3/15/10)

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual framework that guided this study was symbolic interactionism theory, which asserts that phenomena are given meaning through experiences (Blumer, 1969). Perceptions evolve as individuals define and redefine reality through social interactions (Solmon & Carter, 1995).

In order to answer the research questions of this study, the researcher used symbolic interactionism theory to guide the interview questions. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the researcher was able to use the guiding research questions to interpret the meaning these college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities assigned to their physical education experiences. The researcher then presented these assigned meaning of the participants' lived experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to review and discuss the findings of this research. First, the research questions for this study are reviewed and answered. Second, the researcher shares lessons learned from this particular qualitative study and offers suggestions for future research. Finally, the researcher offers recommendations to physical education teachers and share final thoughts on this study.

Review of Research Questions

Research Question One

How did college wheelchair athletes with physical disabilities experience physical education in elementary, middle school, and high school?

Throughout this study it was clear the participants did not experience physical education as fully and meaningfully included members of the classroom. However, 9 out of the 10 participants genuinely enjoyed their physical education experiences. In a study done by Blinde and McCallister, they found students with disabilities often viewed their physical education experiences as having limited participation which in turn made them have a negative attitude toward physical education (1989). In this study, there may have been activities that the participants did not participate in, or things they would change, but for the most part these nine participants were pleased with the physical education they received in elementary, middle, and high school. There were several reasons the participants seemed to have enjoyed their physical education experiences.

One reason the participants seemed to enjoy their physical education experiences was that they felt the teachers and students responded positively to their disabilities. Justin and Mark mentioned on several occasions that they felt completely comfortable in physical education because they had good relationships with their physical education teachers and friends. Meredith also said that her teachers were willing to work with her for the most part and allowed her to do pretty much whatever she wanted.

A second reason the participants enjoyed their physical education experiences was because they enjoyed the activities they got to do, even if it meant they were not being included with the rest of the class. For example, Meredith enjoyed having the gym all to herself in middle

school and high school. When her class went outside, she was given the opportunity to stay inside and shoot baskets, which she “loved” (Interview, Meredith, 3/14/10). When she did participate with the class, she also enjoyed being the all-time goalie; however, she was not sure if this was because she really enjoyed it, or if she felt like it was the only choice she had in order to be allowed to participate in the activity.

In both individual interviews and the focus groups interviews, the participants talked about activities they enjoyed. The activities included, but were not limited to, kickball, dodge ball, basketball, weight lifting, and swimming. Kickball was by far the most popular game among the participants, even if they had to have a designated runner when they played.

A third reason the participants enjoyed their physical education experiences was because they had involvement within their school’s sports teams. It can be seen that opportunities to compete with others in interscholastic sports is usually only available for typically developing students and not for students with disabilities (Nixon, 1984). Yet in this study, 3 of the 10 participants, all female, were involved on at least one of their school’s able-bodied sports teams. Callie participated on three different teams from the 6th grade through the 12th grade. Elizabeth and Lexie both participated on their middle school and high school track teams. However, they both compared it to competing against themselves because they were not allowed to actually compete against any of the able-bodied athletes. One participant, Justin, was asked by his school’s tennis coach if he wanted to play, but Justin turned him down.

There were four participants who were either directly involved or asked to be involved with their school’s sports teams, but did not actually play. Two of these participants were injured during the time they were in high school and both played on the sports teams prior to their injuries. Alex stayed involved with both the football and basketball teams at his school, by

traveling with the teams to all of their games. Fred was asked to serve as a manger or an assistant with his school's basketball and golf team, but he turned them down.

Robbins was asked by her school if she wanted to help with the stats for her school's basketball and volleyball teams which she did by going to every game with the team. Mark's role was a little different because he actually got to serve as an assistant coach for his school's basketball teams. While he served as an assistant coach, he went to all practices and even dressed out to help with outlet passes. He also traveled to all the games, unless they conflicted with his wheelchair basketball schedule.

As far as the participants who were injured later, none of them felt that they had great experiences before their injury and bad ones after. However, they felt that their experiences were different. Alex showed this when he talked about traveling with his high school's football team to state and having a feeling that he was "missing out" (Interview, Alex, 3/23/10). Fred also showed this when he said "the way people looked at me and reacted to me was different" (Interview, Fred, 3/15/10).

Only one participant did not view her physical education experiences as pleasant. Lexie talked very openly about how she did not enjoy physical education in elementary, middle, or high school. The main reason, similar to the one found in the study done by Blinde and McCallister (1989), she credited her negative feelings toward her physical education experiences to the fact that she never felt like she was fully included in her physical education classes. Despite having unpleasant physical education experiences, Lexie has continued to remain actively involved in sports and physical activity.

Research Question Two

Do college wheelchair athletes feel they were included equally and meaningfully throughout their physical education experiences?

The majority of the participants felt they were included in physical education with various adaptations. However, when asked directly if their participation was equal and meaningful inclusion, most answers were negative. Even the meaning of the two words, equally and meaningfully, could be separated for different participants' experiences. For example, Meredith talked about how she enjoyed spending time in the gym alone shooting baskets. To Meredith, in this experience she was included because she was being physically active in her physical education class and it was meaningful to her because she was playing basketball outside of the school. However, there is nothing equal about an entire physical education class being outside doing one activity, while one student remains inside, unsupervised, doing another activity.

Another example with the situation being reversed, is when Lexie talked about her experience playing dodge ball. She was included because she played with the rest of her class and although she did not feel it was equal, she had the same opportunity to get people out as they did her, but this experience was not meaningful, and she never really got a chance to play. She was the first one out because she "was an easy target" (Interview, Lexie, 3/22/10). This feeling was similar to the findings of Goodwin and Watkinson, who found that some students tend to view physical education as a place where isolation and humiliation are common (2000).

There were several examples of this sentiment throughout the data. Within the data, several possible reasons for the participants not being included equally and meaningfully were identified. The first of these was that accessibility sometimes posed as a problem.

One example of accessibility posing a problem was seen by the fact that Meredith did not dress out for her middle or high school physical education class like the rest of the students. The reason she did not dress out was because the locker room was not accessible to her. She would have had to bring her clothes with her and use the women's restroom to change, so she decided it was not worth the trouble.

Another example of accessibility posing a problem was when Lexie was in high school physical education and her class was going to use the weight room, she would have to carry her walker down the stairs to the basement where the weight room was located. There was no ramp or elevator. The fact that the weight room was not easily accessible both upset and frustrated Lexie throughout her high school physical education experiences. Both Elizabeth and Meredith mentioned that it was really hard for them to get outside where their physical education classes took place due to the grass, the pebble or dirt tracks, or the hills.

A second reason the participants were not included equally and meaningfully throughout their physical education experiences was because participant choice and modifications played a factor. For example, several of the participants were given a "choice" of whether they wanted to participate in their physical education classes. If they were to receive the same grade as the students who were required to participate, how is that equal? Plainly and simply, it is not.

Some of the participants mentioned they felt like they were included and that they did not need any modifications in order for them to participate; however, later in the interviews they would contradict that by saying that they "sat around" because they couldn't "do anything" (Interview, Elizabeth, 3/30/10). Elizabeth also specifically talked about not being able to participate in physical education on field day and how this was upsetting to her, which was a prime example of her not being included equally and meaningfully.

Although the participants of this study were not included equally and meaningfully throughout their physical education experiences in elementary, middle, and high school, the participants were unsure of whom to blame. When Callie's coach tried to not let her play because of her disability, she clearly placed blame on the coach, but other participants thought differently. Many of the participants believed their physical education teachers did the best they could.

In physical education, Mark participated in most activities. He had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and his physical education teacher was what he considered a "close friend" (Interview, Mark, 3/15/10). However, he openly described his inability to participate in all activities equally and meaningfully in his physical education classes. He did not place the blame on his physical education teachers because he said they would ask him questions about what he could do and what he thought about different activities, but yet there were still activities he did not participate in. Other participants felt like their physical education teachers were unprepared or did not know how to prepare fully inclusive physical education lessons. Either way, these college wheelchair athletes were not included equally and meaningfully throughout their physical education classes. In most cases it seemed, at best, it was a day-to-day situation.

Research Question Three

What meaning, if any, do college wheelchair athletes give to their prior physical education experiences?

The conceptual framework that guided this study was grounded in Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism theory, which asserted that phenomena are given meaning through experiences. Perceptions evolve as individuals define and redefine reality through social interactions (Solmon & Carter, 1995). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized

in order to address the meaning of the college wheelchair athletes' reflections on physical education experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology is described by van Manen (1990) as "research as oriented towards lived experience and interpreting the 'texts' of life" (p. 4). This is not only a description, but an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). In this case, the researcher made an interpretation of the meaning of the participants' reflections on their physical education experiences.

Throughout this study, the data indicated that the participants assigned both positive and negative meanings to their physical education experiences. One way the participants assigned meanings to their physical education experiences was when they chose and brought an artifact that represented their physical education experiences to the focus group interviews. For example, Lexie brought a strap to her focus group interview, that she said represented the fact she was "held back in physical education" (Focus Group A, Lexie, 4/28/10). Within Lexie's interview, it was clear she felt negatively about her physical education experiences. In both cases, she has assigned a negative meaning to her prior physical education experiences.

Reed brought a picture of a dodge ball game to his focus group interview. In his interview he had expressed that he enjoyed his physical education experiences and that dodge ball had been one of his favorite activities throughout physical education. Clearly, Reed has assigned a positive meaning to his physical education experiences.

Another example of this was when Justin brought a picture of a park bench to his focus group interview. During both the focus group interview and his individual interview, Justin expressed that flipping over a park bench in physical education proved to be an experience that ultimately led him to feel "accepted" (Focus Group B, Justin, 4/28/10).

The participants chose what artifact they brought to their focus group interviews as long as they felt it represented their physical education experiences. In every case their artifacts presented the same meanings toward their prior physical education experiences that their individual interviews produced.

Another example of how the individuals assigned meaning to their prior physical education experiences was how they reflected on certain activities in which they participated. For example, 8 of the 10 participants talked about physical fitness testing. All eight of these participants assigned meaning to how they experienced physical fitness testing in their physical education classes. These meanings were positive, negative, or both.

Elizabeth assigned both a positive and negative meaning to her experiences with physical fitness testing within her physical education classes. She assigned a positive meaning toward physical fitness testing when she talked about breaking her school's v sit-n-reach record. She assigned a negative meaning toward physical fitness testing when she talked about how she was not allowed to count her mile time from her track chair, instead she had to do the mile in her everyday chair which made her time significantly slower. Both of these meanings were assigned during one overall experience, "physical fitness testing," but the two meanings were assigned to different activities within the physical fitness testing. One activity, the v sit-n-reach, Elizabeth considered to be her "moment in P.E." (Focus Group A, Elizabeth, 4/28/10) whereas the other activity, the mile run, made her feel singled out because she wasn't allowed to use her track chair.

The findings for this study were summarized into five themes: (a) participants felt they were included in physical education, but not really equally and meaningfully; (b) physical fitness testing was the most remembered physical education experience; (c) the participants' sporting

experiences were recognized by the school; (d) overall participants' physical education experiences were enjoyable; and (e) the participants have suggestions for physical educators on including individuals with disabilities in physical education. Also, within four of these overall themes, several sub-themes emerged. These themes and sub-themes emerged within in the data due to the meanings these college wheelchair athletes assigned to their prior "lived experiences" of how they experienced physical education in elementary, middle, and high school.

Research Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the valuable lessons learned during the data collection and analysis process, the researcher offers the following recommendations for future research on how college wheelchair athletes or individuals with disabilities experience physical education in elementary, middle, and high school.

First of all, I would recommend a detailed qualitative study of not only how college wheelchair athletes reflect on physical education experiences, but also how their physical education teachers reflect on their teaching experiences. One of the frustrations I experienced when collecting and analyzing the data for this study was that I was only collecting one side of the story. Many times I felt as if I were only scratching the surface on each of the participants' physical education experiences. Instead of being able to specifically understand each participants' physical education program, I gathered pieces of information on 10 different physical education programs. I believe if I had also included the physical education teachers' reflections on their teaching experiences during the time they had each of these college wheelchair athletes, I would have been able to provide a more detailed description of these physical education programs by visiting the school, interviewing the physical education teachers, and by observing these physical education teachers teach.

Another advantage of looking at the physical education teachers' reflections of these experiences is that it would allow the physical education teachers of these students to see how their teaching strategies and styles have impacted the way these college athletes reflect on their physical education experiences. It would also allow the college wheelchair athletes to understand the reflections their physical education teachers had on experiences from the teaching standpoint. For example, I would have been able to verify if Lexie's physical education teachers felt that they were not including her equally and meaningfully. Conversely, I would have been able to show her physical education teachers that this is how she felt about her physical education experiences.

Secondly, I would recommend conducting a qualitative study along these lines but with wheelchair athletes from other countries. Physical education programs differ all over the world. In many cases, schools in the United States do not require students to have physical education every year whereas other countries make it annual physical education mandatory for their students. Countries also have different views on wheelchair athletes and including individuals with physical disabilities in physical education. It would be interesting to see if wheelchair athletes from other countries had similar or completely different physical education experiences from these college wheelchair athletes from the United States.

Another recommendation I offer is to investigate the perceptions of junior wheelchair basketball players' physical education experiences. In most cases, the individuals who play college wheelchair sports from the United States typically get their start playing on a junior wheelchair basketball team. By investigating the individuals while they are still in school system, it would add to the data collection and analysis to be able to observe them while in their physical education classes. Additionally, these observations could lead to interview questions for both the

junior wheelchair basketball players and their physical education teachers on how they are experiencing being a student or experiencing being a teacher in this particular classroom setting.

Finally, I would recommend a longitudinal study that would follow one participant with a physical disability, or a group of participants if available in the same geographical location, through their physical education experience from kindergarten through 12th grade. Even though some of the participants in this study were 19, it was still sometimes difficult for the participants to reflect back on their prior physical education experiences, especially their experiences in elementary school physical education. A prolonged study, however, would surely provide for rich data on how individuals with disabilities experience physical education as well as provide data on whether physical educators are truly including students with disabilities equally and meaningfully as they should be.

Recommendations for Physical Educators

Physical educators need to review or perhaps reconceptualize what inclusion in physical education means. My recommendations for physical education teachers are organized three main areas: (a) voices of students with physical disabilities, (b) assumptions, and (c) providing opportunities.

In order to assess whether physical education classes are truly including students with physical disabilities there is no one better to ask than these students themselves. Asking students with physical disabilities what they can do is a start. Planning and implementing the lessons in which they can participate is the next step. As physical education teachers, it is our job to provide equal and meaningful education to all students in our classes. Physical education is “the school curriculum that leads to remaining physically active for a lifetime” (Graham et al., 2007, p. 4). The purpose of a quality physical education program is to guide students in the process of

becoming physically active for their entire lifetime. In order to understand what will be meaningful and beneficial for individuals with disabilities we must talk to students or former students with physical disabilities and find out how they are experiencing or have experienced physical education.

Assumptions play a big part of how individuals with disabilities experience physical education. This was evident several times throughout my study. Just because a student has a disability does not mean a physical education teacher should assume what he or she will or will not be able to do. In an example from my study, Elizabeth was placed in the “caring and sharing” group and she was given no choice. Whether this was because of her disability is unclear, because all the members of the “caring and sharing group” were female so it could have had to do with the fact she was a female, not the fact that she used a wheelchair. Either way, the decision to “assume” this is the group she belongs in is not okay. As a teacher myself, I would not want someone to walk into a class I am teaching and decide what kind of teacher I am just by the way I look. Assumptions are a very dangerous thing and I recommend that if physical education teachers have a student with a physical disability they get to know this student by asking questions and doing research on the disability in order to plan the best curriculum for the entire class, not just assume what this student is or is not capable of doing.

The last recommendation I have for physical education teachers is to provide opportunities for everyone in their classes equally. If physical education teachers use the recommendations laid out above, the ideas for opportunities on including students with disabilities equally and meaningfully might be given to them directly from the students themselves. There is no way to know until we ask.

Final Thoughts

Public Law 94-142 demands that children with disabilities receive the same education as students without disabilities, including in physical education. There have been surprisingly few studies on perceptions of physical education experiences among students with disabilities and to the best of my knowledge there are no studies on how college students with physical disabilities experience physical education in elementary, middle, and high school and until now there have been no studies done on college wheelchair athletes' reflections on physical education experiences.

The focus of this study was to add the voices of collegiate wheelchair athletes to that of teachers, parents, classmates, administrators, and researchers in the discussion of inclusive physical education by asking the question: How do college wheelchair athletes reflect on their physical education experiences? The term reflection was used to refer to the interpretations and meanings of these reflections that these individuals with disabilities have assigned to their own physical education experiences (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000).

This present study opens up the opportunity for researchers, physical education teacher education professionals, and physical education teachers to hear the voices of 10 college wheelchair athletes as they reflect back on their physical education experiences. It also provides a starting point for future research looking at how not only college wheelchair athletes, but individuals with physical disabilities, experience physical education throughout school. This information could provide physical education teacher training programs and physical educators an insight on what is happening in our school systems today and whether or not changes need to be made.

Although this study only looked at how 10 college wheelchair athletes experienced physical education, it is clear that not all physical education is inclusive physical education. It is important to utilize this information and any future research done in this area to make changes in our school systems. Individuals with disabilities need to be provided the same opportunities as students without disabilities whether this is in the physical education classroom or when playing sports. It is not just a good IDEA to include students with disabilities into physical education, equally and meaningfully, it is a law.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR
PARTICIPATION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

“College Wheelchair Athletes: Reflections on Physical Education Experiences”

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jean Ann Hargreaves, Department of Kinesiology and Dr. Brent Hardin, Department of Kinesiology from The University of Alabama. We hope to learn how college wheelchair athletes experienced physical education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a full-time college student and are actively participating in organized wheelchair sport at the collegiate level.

You are being asked to participate in two audio taped formal interviews, the first lasting approximately 45 minutes and the second lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. You are also being asked to participate in a videotaped and audio taped focus group interview in which you will participate along with four other participants. This focus group interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The total amount of time you will be interviewed with range from 2.75 hours to 3.75 hours. We would like your permission to use all of this data in the research project described above.

The information provided will be confidential. Only the researchers and the other participants in the focus group interview will know the identity of the participants. In the event that the information collected is published in a professional journal, your confidentiality will be protected by referring to you only by pseudonym. On completion of the study the results will be made available and explained to you.

The nature of the data collection ensures that there is no physical or psychological risk of any kind to you. The data that could be gained from such a study would provide a valuable addition to the physical education literature and more specifically the adapted physical education literature. The data collection techniques may well improve future physical education experiences for students with disabilities. The data may well facilitate the enhancement of inclusion in physical education for individuals with disabilities. I cannot, however, guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Alabama or your role as a college athlete. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about this research contact: Jean Ann Hargreaves: 205-203-0057 or helm002@crimson.ua.edu or Dr. Brent Hardin (Ms. Hargreaves' advisor) at 205-348-5109 or bhardin@ua.edu .Finally, if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant

you may contact Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at 205-348-8461.

AUTHORIZATION: I have read the above and understand the nature of this study and agree to participate. I understand that by agreeing to participate in this study I have not waived any legal or human rights. I also understand that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice. Finally, I understand that I will receive a copy of this form.

Signature _____ Date

Researcher as witness _____ Date

Audio Taping Consent

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interviews and focus group interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to ensure data trustworthiness. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office and only available to the researcher and her advisor. We will only keep these tapes until the interviews have been transcribed and the transcripts have been checked by the participant. Once this is completed, the researcher will then destroy the tapes.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audiotaped and I give my permission to the research team to record the interview.

Yes, my participation in these qualitative interviews can be audiotaped.

No, I do not want my participation in these qualitative interviews to be audiotaped.

APPENDIX B
BACKGROUND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Interview Protocol

**This interview script will be used as a guide with all the participants. Multiple prompts will be given throughout according to how the participant answers the questions.

Participant Background:

Name:

How old are you?

Where are you from?

Prompts: Did you stay in one place? Move around a lot? If moved, explain.

What kind of schools did you attend? (i.e., Private, Public, Fine Arts, etc.)

What is your disability?

Is it congenital or acquired?

If acquired, how so? How old were you?

If congenital, when was it noticed? By who? (i.e., doctor(s), family member, guardian, etc.)

Participant Family Background:

Who did you grow up with?

Prompts: parents? Grandparents? Aunts/Uncles? Guardians? Other?

Do you have siblings?

Do any of your family members have a disability?

Do you consider your family close and involved or not as involved?

What activities did or do you do with your family? With your friends?

Do you or did you watch sports with your family? With your friends?

Participant Background on Interests:

Do you like physical activity?

If yes, what types and why? If no, why not?

If yes, do you like activities that include groups or more individualized? Explain.

Do you like sports?

Which ones?

How long have you participated in sports?

How did you get started? Explain in detail.

i.e. who influenced your start? Where did you start playing? Etc.

Do you enjoy being physically active and playing sports? Why or why not? Explain in detail.

College Background:

What year are you in college?

Did you attend any higher education institution prior to attending this one?

How did you hear about this university?

Did you come here to play sports while you attend college?

If yes, are you on scholarship?

Did you play sports at any other higher education institution prior to this?

If yes, where? Why did you leave there to come here?

What is your major? Minor?

Why did you choose this major (and minor)?

How much longer until you graduate?

Do you plan to continue to play sports until you graduate?

Do you plan to continue to play sports after graduation?

APPENDIX C

PHYSICAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCES INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Physical Education Experiences Interview Protocol

This interview script will be used as a guide with all the participants. Multiple prompts will be given throughout according to how the participant answers the questions.

- **Note:** Questions with an * in front will be asked if the participant has indicated their disability was present during this time of their life.

Elementary School:

Tell me about your elementary school.

What type of school? Where was it? How long was it each day?

What grade levels were in this school? (i.e., k-5, k-6, k-2, 3-5, etc.)

Did you have an organized physical education class?

If yes:

How many days a week?

How long?

Was it co-ed?

Did you dress out or wear your school clothes?

What types of activities do you remember doing?

*Were you able to participate in these activities?

*If no, were you allowed to participate?

*Were any activities adapted for you?

* Did any activities need to be adapted for you that were not?

*How did the students respond?

* How did the teacher(s) respond?

Was there physical fitness testing?

*Did you participate in the physical fitness testing?

*Was the physical fitness testing adapted at all for your disability?

If yes, how so? If no, do you feel it should have been? Explain.

How were you graded in class?

*Could you do everything?

If no, what did you do when you couldn't do something? Were alternative activities given to you?

*Were you included in all activities?

Equally? Meaningfully? Explain in detail.

What do you remember most from your elementary school physical education?

What was your favorite thing? Least favorite thing? Explain in detail.

If no:

What type of physical education or activity time did you have at your school? Explain in detail.

[Use similar questions from above that may fit with this answer for prompts]

Middle School:

Tell me about your middle school.

What type of school? Where was it? How long was it each day?

What grade levels were in this school? (i.e., 5-6, 6-8, 6-9, etc.)

[Note: questions may have different answers for different grades within middle school so they may need to be asked for different grade levels.]

Did you have an organized physical education class?

If yes:

How many days a week?

How long?

Was it co-ed?

Did you dress out or wear your school clothes?

What types of activities do you remember doing?

*Were you able to participate in these activities?

*If no, were you allowed to participate?

*Were any activities adapted for you?

* Did any activities need to be adapted for you that were not?

*How did the students respond?

* How did the teacher(s) respond?

Was there physical fitness testing?

*Did you participate in the physical fitness testing?

*Was the physical fitness testing adapted at all for your disability?

If yes, how so? If no, do you feel it should have been? Explain.

How were you graded in class?

*Could you do everything?

If no, what did you do when you couldn't do something? Were alternative activities given to you?

*Were you included in all activities?

Equally? Meaningfully? Explain in detail.

What do you remember most from your middle school physical education?

What was your favorite thing? Least favorite thing? Explain in detail.

If no:

What type of physical education or activity time did you have at your school? Explain in detail.

[Use similar questions from above that may fit with this answer for prompts]

Did you play sports in middle school?

*Were sports opportunities available for you in middle school?

If yes, what type? How often? Where?

Tell me about any sporting experiences you had in middle school.

High School:

Tell me about your high school.

What type of school? Where was it? How long was it each day?

What grade levels were in this school? (i.e. 6-12, 8-12, 9-12, etc.)

[Note: questions may have different answers for different grades within high school so they may need to be asked for different grade levels.]

Did you have an organized physical education class?

If yes:

How many days a week?

How long?

Was it co-ed?

Did you dress out or wear your school clothes?

What types of activities do you remember doing?

*Were you able to participate in these activities?

*If no, were you allowed to participate?

*Were any activities adapted for you?

* Did any activities need to be adapted for you that were not?

*How did the students respond?

* How did the teacher(s) respond?

Was there physical fitness testing?

*Did you participate in the physical fitness testing?

*Was the physical fitness testing adapted at all for your disability?

If yes, how so? If no, do you feel it should have been? Explain.

How were you graded in class?

*Could you do everything?

If no, what did you do when you couldn't do something? Were alternative activities given to you?

*Were you included in all activities?

Equally? Meaningfully? Explain in detail.

What do you remember most from your high school physical education?

What was your favorite thing? Least favorite thing? Explain in detail.

If no:

What type of physical education or activity time did you have at your school? Explain in detail.

[Use similar questions from above that may fit with this answer for prompts]

Did you play sports in high school?

*Were sports opportunities available for you in high school?

If yes, what type? How often? Where?

Tell me about any sporting experiences you had in high school.

College:

Are you required to take an activity classes for your degree?

If yes, how many hours? If no, do you plan to take any anyway?

Have you taken any activity courses since you've been in college?

If yes, explain your experience in detail.

(What was the course? How many days did the class meet? How long?)

Did anything have to be adapted for you?

How did your instructor include you in the course?

How often do you participate in sports or physical activity?

Besides playing sports for the university, do you participate in other sports?

i.e., intramurals, outside leagues, etc.

Explain in detail any sport or physical activity experiences you have participated or currently participate in.

Conclusion:

Are there any other physical education or sporting experiences you would like to talk about.

Do you have any further comments based on the experiences we have talked about?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Instructions: I am just going to let you take turns telling us what you brought and how it represents your physical education experiences.

Questions and/or Prompts:

What artifact did you bring?

Why?

Explain the meaning and/or significance...

Is it positive or negative? Why?

Note: get the other participants talking...

The researcher will provide prompts if the group is not talking.