The construct of Physical Education

A qualitative study investigating the construct of Physical Education in high school students

Konstruktionen av idrott och hälsa

En kvalitativ studie som undersöker konstruktionen av idrott och hälsa hos gymnasiestudenter

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to investigate the construction of Physical education (PE) in high school students. Participants were 3 female and 5 male high school students, 16-18 years of age. The participants came from 3 different schools in Malmö and differed in amount of conducted physical activity outside of school. Qualitative interviews were conducted and content analyzed. The result showed that the construct of PE was composed by 4 dimensions; Athletic-, Body and Gender-, Scholastic- and Social dimensions. The result can be helpful to understand, interpret and analyze students’ behavior during PE and, in addition, to develop the content and execution of PE in the future.

Keywords: Behavior, High school students, Identity, Physical education.
Sammanfattning


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Appendix A - Intervjuguide
1 Introduction

Teachers in Physical education (PE) are often concerned about students’ behavior and attitude during and towards PE (T. Richard & C. Sjöström, personal communication, September 17, 2008). Sometimes it seems hard to motivate students to even participate in the PE classes. How individuals construct their selves (Berzonsky, 2004) and the world in which they live (Berzonsky, 1993) have shown to be a determinant of their behaviors (Burke, 1991). Thus, behaviors can be seen as enactment of the corresponding identity. How students behave during PE should, hence, be related to their construction of themselves, their identity, during PE. An investigation of the construction of PE in high school students can therefore provide interesting results which can be helpful in the development of PE and, pedagogics and didactics in relation to PE in the future. In the following introduction I will guide the reader through the theoretical assumptions that are underpinning the justification of the study. The text will start from a broad psychological perspective and then be finalized with problem identification, purpose and question at issue.

1.1 Cognition

This thesis will departure from the theoretical assumptions developed in the field of cognitive and social cognitive psychology (see Pervin, Cervone & John, 2005). Cognition is defined to be “the collection of mental processes and activities used in perceiving, remembering, thinking, and understanding, as well as the act of using those processes” (Ashcraft, 2006, p. 11). However, this does not neglect, for instance, human affective and motivational systems (Kunda, 1999); but the cognition is seen as the antecedents of those systems. Thus, individuals’ cognitions and the content of those cognitions determine emotional responses which, in turn, govern individuals’ behaviors (Perris, 1996). The social cognitive perspective departure from the same basic principles as the cognitive perspective but emphasizes the social aspects of cognition and how the social aspects affect behavior (Pervin et al., 2005).

One essential aspect that pervades the cognitive and social cognitive perspective is the theory of schemas (Kunda, 1999). Schemas, which also can be called concepts, constructs (Pervin et al., 2005) or mental representations (Kunda, 1999; the subsequent
text will use *schema* and *construct* to describe the configuration of many *concepts*), are structures that categorize our knowledge in different classes of objects that we believe belong together. For instance, the schema of Physical education (PE) is a mental representation of objects and factors (i.e., concepts) in the PE setting and our evaluation of those concepts. However, the schema of PE is, in turn, constructed by other schemas and concepts. A concept can be seen as the smallest building block in the construct or schema. To use a metaphor, a football or referee can be seen as two of many concepts in the schema of soccer. In turn, a whistle and black clothes can be seen as two concepts in the schema of referee. Likewise, soccer can be seen as a concept in the schema “ball sports”. Markus, (1977) found that schemas guide and categorize information perceived by individuals. One specific type of schema is called self-schema. The self is “the totality of the individual, consisting of all characteristic attributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical” (VandenBos, 2007, p 827). Self-schemas contain the information of the individual’s self (see more about the self-concept under *Personal identity*).

Because the content of every individuals personal construct system (all constructs contained in the human mind) differ from others’ construct systems, individuals will perceive and interpret reality in different ways. Thus, there will be no objective or absolute reality. Phenomena, as PE, will only be meaningful in relation to how they are construed and interpreted by the individual. Accordingly, the cognitive theory corresponds with the ontological standpoints of constructivism (Bryman, 2001).

How individuals construct PE will affect and guide cognitions, emotions and behaviors of the individuals in relation to PE (Perris, 1996). Investigating PE from a cognitive and social cognitive perspective could therefore be fruitful to the area of research and the applied area of PE.

1.2 Identity

Even though the modern research across the social science has developed an amount of ideas about identity, there is still ambiguity about the meaning of the concept (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The research of identity theory has today stranded into two different, but still strongly related, bodies of knowledge (Stryker & Burke). On the one hand, the identity is seen through the eyes of a social structure. On the other hand, the identity is
seen as an internal process of the individual. However, both these perspectives are used in contemporary conceptualization of identity (Stets & Burke, 2000).

In the following text I will present both perspectives. Hopefully this will provide a basic point of departure for how to investigate the construct of PE. After this broad introduction of identity, the subsequent part will deal with the implications of identity and why it is interesting to investigate PE from the perspective of identity.

1.2.1 Social identity

The perspective of social identity emphasize that humans develop their identity from the social positions and social roles they occupy in society. In the early work of identity, James (1890/1948) claimed that individuals have as many roles and categories of their identities as they are involved in groups in society. The role identity was later defined as the role of a particular social position which a person occupies and attributes to the self (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Thus, this perspective claims the individual’s different roles to be the core of their personal identities. However, McCall and Simmons figured that a role identity has both “conventional” and “idiosyncratic” structures. The conventional structure refers to the ‘role’ of the role identity which implies expectations to the social position; for instance, doctor or teacher. The idiosyncratic structure of the identity describes the unique interpretations every individual brings to the role.

Another social view of identity is the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981). This perspective sees identity as embedded in a social group or category (Stets & Burke, 2003). A social group is constituted by more than two people that share the same social identity. The social identity emerges when group members share one or more attribute together. The group members interpret and evaluate themselves from their shared attributes which, in turn, distinguish them from other people; the out-group (Hogg, 2006). The social identity approach has been useful in the description and explanation of prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, intergroup conflict, conformity, normative behavior, group polarization, crowd behavior, leadership, deviance and group cohesiveness (Hogg). However, the weakness of this perspective is the lack of explanation of in-group behavior and role relationships between group members.

To be able to make a idiosyncratic interpretation of a role there has to be internal mechanisms in the individual that execute these processes. Stets and Burke (2000) tries
to overcome the gap between social identity and the internal process of identity by defining identity as follows: “the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance” (p. 225). The authors claim that because of every individual’s personal history the combination of social categories a person is a member of is unique to that person. Thus, every individual gets a unique self-concept (i.e., the composite view of oneself). This describes the sameness and the uniqueness of every human being and is, according to Stets and Burke, one of the overlapping features of identity from a social perspective and from a personal perspective.

1.2.2 Personal identity
In the social-cognitive approach identity is conceptualized as a self-theory – a self-constructed theory of oneself (Berzonsky, 2004). It contains procedural knowledge for making decisions and solving problems as well as representational schemas for understanding events and personal experiences. This social-cognitive statement is based on a constructivist view that people create who they think they are and the world in which they live (Berzonsky, 1993).

The construction of the self is made of different distinct beliefs about the self, the so-called self-schemas (Baumeister, 1995). Together, the different self-schemas construct the self-concept which is the composite view of oneself; or all the organized amount of information that persons have about their selves (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

The self-concept is seen as hierarchical and multidimensional (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Thus, the different dimensions of life are distinguished from each other and organized in an, for the individual, unique hierarchy. Stets and Burke (2000) point out, that the dimensions (e.g., roles and aspects of the self) of an individual’s identity compose the unique self-concept of the individual; the self-concept, which describes the I and the Me, and distinguish one’s self from others (Turner & Onorato, 1999). How the schema of PE is related to other schemas in the personal identity of individuals is, to the author’s knowledge, not known. Thus, to investigate, not only the schema of PE, but the total identity of the individual from a holistic perspective might provide a more accurate picture of the construct of PE.
1.2.3 Implications of identity

Powers’ (1973) and consecutives’ (Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Riley & Burke, 1995) cybernetic theory makes the internal process of identity understandable. It explains human behavior as an outcome of the relation between internal self meanings and situation (Stets, 2006). The essence of the theory is that an identity is a set of meanings attached to the self in a social role, which serves as a standard for the person (Burke, 1991). Each of the dimensions of the self-concept can therefore be seen as identity standards. When a specific identity is activated in a situation, this starts a feedback loop (Burke). The loop is a circular and continuous process, activated to maintain the personal identity in social situations. The loop has four components: (1) the identity standard; (2) a perceptual input of self-relevant meanings from the situation, including how one sees oneself (meaningful feedback in the form of reflected appraisals); (3) a process that compares the perceptual input with the standard; and (4) output to the environment (meaningful behavior), which is a result of the comparison. The goal of the loop is to maintain congruence between the perception and the standard. The behavior will adjust to the environment so that the congruent stimuli can be perceived. If perceptions are congruent with the identity standard, identity verification emerges (Stets, 2006). However, in absence of identity verification, unpleasant feelings will emerge. These unpleasant feelings can be explained by the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987, 1989).

Higgins showed that people have expectations about how they ideally shall be and how they ought to be. These expectations are constructed by themselves and influenced by significant others (e.g., parents). In turn the expectations construct so called self-guides. All behaviors are evaluated and compared to the guides. The self-guides direct behaviors with signals from emotions. If a behavior fail to correspond to the individual’s ought-expectations, agitated feelings such as anxiety will arise. On the other hand, if the individual is falling short of the ideal-self, he or she will experience unpleasant, low-arousal emotions such as sadness and depression. Thus, the goal of behavior is to be congruent with the identity.
1.3 Why investigate identity in the context of PE?

When observing and talking to teachers that are conducting and holding PE lessons, they are often concerned about students’ behaviors and attitudes during and toward PE (T. Richard & C. Sjöström, personal communication, September 17, 2008). It seems like the key question is how to find the “key” to the students. Teachers feel power less against some students’ bad behavior and lack of commitment to PE; and are actually not able to live up to their own identity standards as PE teachers. According to the recognized link between identity and behavior (Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Riley & Burke, 1995), students’ behaviors during PE lessons are connected to their PE related identity, and maybe other identity dimensions as well. However, to the author’s knowledge, there are no studies that have investigated the construct of PE in (Swedish) high school students.

In NU03 (Skolverket, 2005), which is the largest investigation ever conducted of the Swedish school, many interesting relations were found. For instance, 10.4 % of the students are never active in extramural sports (males: 9.6%; females: 11.4) Moreover, activity in extramural sports, correlated positively with students’: A) perception of the PE lessons being pleasant with positive atmosphere (0,189, p<0.001), B) doing their best on the PE lessons (0,314, p<0.001), C) take their responsibility (0,314, p<0.001), D) get to show what they can (0,317, p<0.001), and E) grade in PE (0,425, p<0.001). Grade in PE can be seen as a measure of their achievements (Skolverket, 2005). Achievements can logically be seen as executing an adequate set of behaviors that are required by the situation. To reach high achievements in PE should therefore be related to the extent of PE identity.

Achievements in PE are positively correlated with activity in extramural sports (Skolverket, 2005) and active involvement in sports leads to high athletic identity (i.e., “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role”, (Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993, p 237)) and therefore creates a circular relationship (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000). The athletic identity might therefore be a mediator to the achievements in PE. However, the athletic identity might not be the only mediator to the achievements in PE. Thus, the factors that are composing the construct of PE would be interesting and probably beneficial to investigate.
2 Purpose of the study and question at issue

The purpose of the study is to investigate what factors that compose the construct of PE in Swedish high school students. This could lead to an increased understanding of the complexity of students’ behavior during PE and attitude towards PE. Further, the results could facilitate the development of PE to include more students.

A question will be utilized to achieve the purpose of the study. The question is: What factors compose the construct of physical education in high school students?

3 Method

3.1 Design

To be able to explore what factors that compose the construct of PE a qualitative approach (Kvale, 1997) was embraced. The researcher utilized qualitative interviews as method for data collection. One of the motives for the chosen methodology was that the researcher in this way could address questions like “what kind of? and why?”; which are needed to meet the objective of the study. The subject was investigated from a cross-sectional design (Bryman, 2001) with features of retrospection. Thus, the interviews mostly investigated the participants’ present apprehension of PE but also their thoughts about their prior states related to PE.
3.2 Participants

Participants were eight high school students (see overview of the sample in Table 1).

Table 1.
Overview of the participants of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>sex</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Physical activity</th>
<th>Major interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>SH - E</td>
<td>Very active in both team and individual sports</td>
<td>Sports, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>SH - E</td>
<td>Has been very active in both team and individual sports</td>
<td>Friends, boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>Very active in team sports</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>SH – E</td>
<td>Very active in individual sports</td>
<td>Sports and gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>Relatively active in individual PA</td>
<td>Friends, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Est</td>
<td>Not physically active</td>
<td>Music, politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>SH – SH</td>
<td>Very physically active in individual PA</td>
<td>Gym, jog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>Active in team sports</td>
<td>Rugby, photography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abbreviations:** M = Male; F = Female; P = Private high school; M1 = Municipal High school 1; M2 = Municipal High school 2; SH – E = Samhällsprogrammet Ekonomisk inriktning; SH – SH = Samhällsprogrammet Samhällsinriktning; NV = Naturvetenskapliga programmet; Est = Estetiska programmet; PA = Physical activity.

The participants were chosen by a non-probability sampling strategy with both convenience and purposive motives in the selection process (Berg, 2004). The participants were selected from three criteria: school, gender and physical activity. The purpose was to capture a wide range of these three criteria (i.e., different schools and programs, both males and females and different extent of conducted physical activity and type of physical activity).
Six of the participants lived in Malmö; the remaining two (participants 2 and 4) lived in smaller cities near Malmö. All the three schools, where the sample was selected from, were high schools located in Malmö. P was a private school and the other two are pursued and owned by the municipality. All the participants, except for participant 6, were involved in sports to some extent or had been involved in sports before. Participant 2 and 5 were not involved into club activities anymore but had been. Participant 7 had never really been involved into club sports but did a lot of work out by her self.

All of the participants were over 15 years of age and thus did not need any informed consent from their parents to conduct the interviews (Svensk författningssamling, 2003).

### 3.3 Instrument

An interview guide (see Appendix A) was composed to meet the objective of the study. All questions were derived from a cognitive approach towards identity. Thus, participants were presumed to actively construct their own theory about themselves and the world in which they live (Berzonsky, 2004; Berzonsky, 1993). Moreover, thoughts are seen as the underpinning of emotions which, in turn, govern behaviors (Perris, 1996).

The interview guide was thought to serve as a guide for topics of discussion during the interviews. That did not prohibit new topics to emerge (Patton, 2002). The design of the interview guide was semi-structured with open ended questions, a so called *general interview guide approach* (Patton, 2002). It comprised three parts. The objective of the first part was to explore the general identity construction of the participants (e.g., social roles, and different spheres of life). By doing so it was figured that the construct of PE could be seen with greater complexity. For instance the social roles in the personal identity could affect the construct of PE. A second objective of the first part was to make the interviewees comfortable in the situation and make them talkative (Gordon, 1978); by a general discussion about who they are.

The second part was constructed to explore the athletic identity (i.e., “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p 237) of the participants. The athletic identity was figured to have something to do with the construct of PE as a prior study has shown relations between, on the one hand, physical activity outside of PE and, on the other hand, grade in PE and attitude towards PE.
(Skolverket, 2005). Maybe by investigating the athletic identity, which logically will be stronger in physically active people (Brewer et al., 2000), the construct of PE could be seen with greater complexity.

The third part of the interview guide intended to explore the construct of PE or the PE identity of the participants. Here the PE itself was investigated. How the participant perceived, felt and behaved towards and in the PE setting. This part carried out the essence of the study and therefore it was placed as the third and last part of the interview guide (Gordon, 1978).

All questions from the interview guide were followed up by questions that emerged from the participants’ answers and the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee.

3.4 Procedure

Contact was established with the PE teachers on each school. The PE teacher on school P was initially contacted via telephone. The researcher and the PE teacher then decided an appropriate date for the researcher to come and do interviews with the students during the PE class. Three students from school P volunteered to conduct the interview. Participant 1 (see table 1) was injured and could therefore not participate on the PE; participant 2 had a cold and could therefore not participate on the PE; and participant 4 participated on the PE but wanted to do the interview which was accepted by the PE teacher. The three interviews were conducted at a gym center; where school P execute their PE. A room next to the sports hall was used for the interviews. Thus, the interviewer and the interviewees could sit in private during the interview.

To establish contact with the PE teacher on school M2 the researcher went to the school and talked to the teacher in question. Two of the interviews could be conducted the same day (participants 5 and 6) and the third interview (participant 7) was conducted the day after. All of the participants from school M2 could not participate on the PE because they had catch cold. The PE teacher divided the sports hall in two sections with a folding wall. The PE lesson was held in the one section and the interviews were conducted in the other section. Although it was possible for other people to enter the section where the interview was conducted no one did; with one exception (see the last quotation under the headline Social dimensions in the result part).
The PE teacher on school M1 was contacted in the same way as the PE teacher on school M2; thus, the researcher went to the school and talked to the teacher in question. The two participants from school M1 were interviewed the same day as contact with the teacher was established. Both participants were participating on the PE lesson but wanted to conduct the interview which was accepted by the PE teacher. The two interviews were conducted in the PE teachers’ staff room which was unoccupied by others during the interviews. No one interrupted the interviews or entered the room during the interviews.

All of the interviews started like common conversations, for instance about school or life in general. The goal was to make the interviewee comfortable in the situation and make them talkative (Gordon, 1978). Optimally, the interviewee should not notice a gap between the introducing conversation and the formal interview. However, before the formal interviews started the participants were informed about: a) the purpose of the study, b) that they were free to withdraw at any time without explaining why and without receiving penalty, c) that the interview would be audio recorded with a Dictaphone, d) that all the information about the participants would be treated with confidentiality. This is in accordance with ethical guidelines for studies with humans (American psychological association [APA], 1992; Mitchell & Jolley, 2007). Accordingly, all participants agreed to conduct the interview.

During the interviews the conversations was not strictly regulated by the interview guide. The interviewees all got the opportunity to think free and associate to whatever they wanted. Interesting ideas was followed up by questions.

3.5 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed literally (Kvale, 1997). Thus, pauses, repetitions and hesitations were all included in the transcription of the recorded interviews. However, in hindsight, the paralinguistic language did not affect the result of the study. The explicit answers of the participants were shown to be most fruitful and interesting in regard of the objective of the paper. To treat the interviews confidentially, while analyzing and presenting them, each participant was given a number between 1 and 8.

Social constructivism was utilized as the basic point of departure of the analysis. Thus, the result of the analysis does not claim to be a picture of an observable reality but instead a representation of the internal world of high school students and their
construction of reality (Patton, 2002). However, content analysis (Patton) was the method employed for analyzing the data. All the transcribed interviews were read more than once to become familiar with the text. Each participant then got an individual profile where interesting parts, sentences and words, from that particular interview, were brought together. All individual profiles were then analyzed together and interesting parts from all interviews where abstracted to different lower order themes including common meanings of the data material. The lower order themes where then abstracted to higher order themes which constituted the categories addressed to directly meet the objective of the study.

Moreover, due to the absence of directing theoretical frameworks during the analysis, the analysis can be seen as inductive. Thus, new themes and patterns could emerge during the analysis without being directed by theories (Patton). However, because the interview guide partly had been developed from theoretical assumptions the result can be seen as derived from both inductive (the analysis) and deductive (the interview guide) processes.

Further, the result will be presented as a coherent case study (Nylen, 2005) that will reflect the data. The aim is to convey knowledge, to the reader, about the part of reality that has been investigated. The result will be presented with figures and text including descriptions and appropriate quotations from the interviews.

To attain high validity, all the participants got to see their own interview transcripts and, if they wanted to, revise, add or delete the content of the transcripts. No participants choose to adjust anything in the transcripts. Thus, the transcripts of the interviews seemed to be in accordance with the intended answers of the participants. In addition to the researcher, one Bachelor of Science in sport psychology and two Bachelors of Science in physical education examined the individual profiles to see their correspondence with the lower and higher order themes. Some interesting discussions emerged during the examinations and some things were changed to describe the results more accurate.

To provide the reader with an apprehension of whom the person is who has written the introduction, conducted the interviews and analyzed the data, a short description will follow. I am a male of 26 years of age. The last five and a half years I have studied at Malmö, Halmstad and Kristianstad University. In Malmö I have studied PE for almost six semesters. In Kristianstad I studied mainstream psychology for 2 semesters. In Halmstad I studied sport psychology for 4 semesters and I will soon receive my
European master’s degree in sport and exercise psychology. My Master’s thesis was about personal identity in adolescent athletes. I have been involved in extramural sports; such as football, basketball and golf. Now days, I only conduct physical activity by myself.

4 Results

The result was divided into four segments. The segments emerged through analysis of the data from the interviews and they will all be presented separately. The four segments are: A) Athletic dimensions, B) Body and gender dimensions, C) Scholastic dimensions, D) Social dimensions (see figure 1 for an overview of the result). The result is intended to be presented as unbiased and unanalyzed as possible. Thus, the results reflect only the participants’ narratives and the information extracted from the transcriptions.

The objective of the study was to investigate what factors that compose the construct of physical education in high school students. Thus, the sub-dimensions (athletic, body & gender, scholastic and social) should be seen as the factors composing and influencing the construct of PE. Each sub-dimension is constructed by schemas (see introduction under cognition). To be more precise, the names of the sub-dimensions must not be actual schemas per se; rather, the sub-dimensions are groups of schemas relating to the same (sub) category or label. For instance, the athletic dimension is per se a schema which comprises two other schemas (Biography of sports and increased perceived self-efficacy). However, Biography of sports, for instance, must not be a real schema as it is represented in the participants, but rather a group of concepts and schemas related to the label Biography of sports.
4.1 Athletic dimensions

One part of the construct of PE was composed by athletic dimensions. In turn, the athletic dimensions contained two lower order themes. They were A) Biography of sports, and B) Increased perceived self-efficacy (Self-efficacy is defined as "people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute a course of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). All in all, the athletic dimensions concern the participants' athletic experiences in extramural sports.

Some participants’ perceived their earlier experiences of sports to influence their image of PE; this theme is called Biography of sports. The logic was that if you had been involved in sports earlier in life the experience of PE was familiar to you and vice versa. Parents could be one of the reasons for involvement in sports from the beginning but they were not a necessity. Participant 2 figured that because her parents reinforced and encouraged her to be physically active in younger age she now had a positive attitude towards PE. However, some participants, even though they did not have very good experiences from extramural sports earlier in life, still seemed to have a positive attitude towards PE.

The Biography of sports did not only increase familiarity with PE but it did also increase the Perceived self-efficacy (in the PE setting. It was especially the participants
who were active in team sports and gymnastics that perceived this relationship. Participant 2, that had been both a gymnast and a football player, said that she was well prepared to do whatever the content of the PE lessons were. She had never been afraid of doing any exercises on the PE lessons and had never experienced any negative emotions prior to physically demanding PE lessons as her friends had. According to the participants, the increased self-efficacy gave them a more positive image of PE. They stated that because PE was about performing physical exercises it was logical that they would do better because they did physical exercise outside of PE as well. However, there was one exception. Participant 4 perceived a very high self-efficacy on the PE lessons due to his gymnastic background but it did not result in a more positive image of PE; actually it was the other way around. Due to his high self-efficacy he experienced boredom during the PE lessons (See more about this under Social dimensions – Social comparison). He saw PE as redundant because he did not learn anything during those lessons that he could apply to his reality. With a highly intensive training schedule in gymnastics he could not see any purpose with participating in the PE. In addition, his teacher was, according to himself, aware of what physical ability he had outside of PE and therefore it was obvious that he had the highest grade in PE.

4.2 Body and gender dimensions

The segment of body and gender dimensions comprises three subcategories. They are A) Body awareness, B) Gender, and C) Physical ability. On the whole, the Body and gender dimensions concern the participants’ awareness of their physical body, its ability and the connection between gender and sports.

The Body awareness was mentioned by two females (participants 2 & 7) and one male (Participant 4) in the study; by different reasons though. The females perceived their body awareness to increase during the PE lessons; which led to negative consequences. Participant 2 did only experience this increase when the class was swimming as a part of the PE. She thought about her gain in weight and paleness.

It was much more fun to have swimming on the schedule when one was younger. Because now it is such an anxiety every time. You know ”oh god I look so pale and have gained in weight”. One is not at all comfortable in that situation… and when we had swimming the first year in high school less than half of the girls participated… there were hardly any girls at all.
However, she had never cut classes of swimming due to her negative body image because it was too difficult and complicated to compensate the absence. However, she also mentioned that when her class is swimming, less than fifty percent of the girls are present. The other female had high body awareness during the PE in general; not only when swimming. She was preoccupied with what other people thought about her weight and therefore she felt inhibited to do physical exercises. As a result, she often skipped classes or stayed in the background during the PE lessons. She did not suffer from overweight, and she knew that; nevertheless she did see her self as an overweight person. The male mentioned a different aspect of body awareness than the two females did. One of the reasons to his high grade in PE was, according to him, due to his very fit and well-trained body. According to him self, the teacher could see that he was in good shape and therefore it was easier for the teacher to give him a high grade.

The second subcategory is called Gender. One of the female participants, the same participant who thought she was overweight, perceived PE and sports to be activities for men. She had problems to perform during the PE sessions because she did not want her classmates to perceive her as a “tomboy”. In her culture, she was originally from Albania, females did not do sports to the same extent as in Sweden. By the same reason, she did not feel comfortable to do her best in the PE classes. Her father said, once in a while, that sports are not for females. Yet, she was physically active during her leisure after school. She did often go to the gym and/or jog. This was no problem for her because her personal training outside of school felt more depersonalized; thus, no one that she knew could observe her when being physically active.

The perceived Physical ability was mentioned as a factor composing the construct of PE by a couple of the participants (3, 5, 6 & 8). Some participants that were highly physically active on their leisure considered their performances in PE to stand in positive relation to their extent of physical activity outside of PE. Because they did cardiovascular and strength training outside of PE they could manage the activities on the PE lessons better. This subcategory has strong connections with the subcategories Perceived self-efficacy and Identification with a skewed image of PE.
4.3 Scholastic dimensions

The scholastic dimensions embrace factors of school that compose the construct of PE. The scholastic dimensions comprise three subcategories: A) *Ambitious in school*, B) *Skewed image of PE*, and C) *The PE teacher*.

Many of the participants were *Ambitious in school*. Even though participant 5 did not consider herself to be preoccupied with her own health, (rather she perceived herself as not physically active and a person who enjoys spending time on the couch eating candy), she felt a responsibility to make an effort on the PE lessons. She wanted to become a veterinary and thus needed high grades to be admitted to the veterinary education.

However, she and many of the other participants had a *Skewed image of PE*. For instance, the female just mentioned, aimed towards a high grade in PE and believed she would reach that grade because she made an effort on the PE lessons. Thus, the effort by itself was considered to be enough for receiving higher grades. She also perceived herself to have a good grip of the PE curriculum. She said that the PE teachers thoroughly go through the curriculum together with the students, at the start of the semester, so the students know what is required for each grade. As an example she explained that her teacher had told the class that if they wanted to receive more than “Pass” (G) as a grade in Physical Education A (Idrott och hälsa A), they had to hold a lesson with the rest of the class as a leadership exercise (i.e., they should, one by one, act teachers and hold a lesson). The fact that the participants had a skewed image of PE was rather pervasive through all the interviews. Participant 4 thought it was too easy to receive good grades in PE and stated that the PE curriculum said that “all you have to do is your best to receive a high grade”. All the participants stated that it was the effort that did count when they became graded by the teacher. However, the participants’ opinion in general was that if you are not physically active besides on the PE you have no chance to receive the highest grade in PE. To receive the highest grade, according to the participants, you have to do some cardiovascular and strength training on your leisure.

The third subcategory that affected the scholastic dimension of the PE construct was the *PE teacher*. Participant 4 wanted to be able to identify with the PE teacher. His prior PE teacher was a bodybuilder and thus shared the same interest as himself. This was important to him. He stated that it ought to be visual that the PE teacher is a physically
active person. This worked as some kind of motivator to him. However, once when they should do cardiovascular tests on the PE and he was not in a good shape he skipped the lesson because he did not wanted his teacher (the bodybuilder) to know that he was not fit.

One of the females (participant 5) had had a bad experience of her PE teacher in upper elementary school. For instance, he pushed the students to do things they did not want. She could see both pros and cons about that. The good thing was that she could stand doing more boring exercises and she did never give up as some of her class mates tend to do. On the other hand, she still had problems with doing things he had forced her to do (e.g., high jump). Moreover, he did sometimes behave oddly. As an example she described a particular occasion:

There was one guy who wanted to play basketball with the girls when we were divided [by gender]. Many of the boys played basketball so of course they were better. So this guy wanted to play with us because he was more on our level. Then the teacher told him, like, that he had to do an appropriate change of his sex. Those kinds of things happened with him but not otherwise.

4.4 Social dimensions

The Social dimensions included factors that were connected to interpersonal relations both inside and outside of PE. The segment included three subcategories: A) Identification with other dimensions, B) Group belonging and identification with class mates, and C) Social comparison.

The Identification with other dimensions (i.e., a dimension is a sphere of life in which a person interacts with other people) seemed to influence the construct of PE. One of the females (participant 2) had an extra job at a restaurant in her hometown; where she worked as a waitress and bartender. The extra job collided with her PE lesson every Friday and created difficult circumstances to deal with. This is how she described her situation with extra job and PE:

The work can be a little bit touchy sometimes. We serve quite many lunches and on Fridays it is very many lunches and if we shall be able to have bar at the evening, and clear the tables before, I really have to start a bit earlier and that is why I am not always here [On the PE]. I have a really bad conscious because of that, I really do. I actually wrote a mail to [The PE teacher] and asked if I could do an exercise diary instead to compensate my absence

[Researcher]: ok, so you are prioritizing work more than you are prioritizing PE then?
[Participant]: uch, it sounds horrible but it is probably what I do. One feel more forced to go to work than to go here. Otherwise I know that my boss will call me fifteen times and I know that [The PE teacher] will not do that. He will not call me and ask me where I was.
[Researcher]: Ok, but if you could do what you wanted to, had you been here instead of at the work then?
[Participant]: actually yes, because if one thinks about it, I will still have the work but my grade in PE is harder to change afterwards. So it would have been better to do this now, like the drivers license, to do it so it is done.

As can be interpreted, there was a relationship between the both dimensions. Thus, the construct of PE was affected and interrelated to the construct of extra job.

A reverse interrelation but similar phenomenon was explained by participant 5. She worked as a “confirmation leader” and had strong religious believes. According to her, the religious believes and the experience of being a confirmation leader made her, for instance, more relaxed when speaking in public. She had no problems to stand up and talk about her religious believes and she felt more confident and secure as a person than she thought she would do without her religious believes.

Moreover, participant 6 stated that he did not do sports or was physically active on his spare time because he prioritized music and political activities. Even though this has nothing to do with PE, he saw a connection between his performance in PE and his extent of physical activity outside of school. Thus, by prioritizing music and political activities higher than physical activities on his spare time he performed less good in PE.

Another social dimension that composed the construct of PE was the Group belonging and identification with class mates. Participant 2 stated that she did not feel comfortable in the class and therefore she did not perform well on the PE classes. In upper elementary school she had been a leader with high confidence and she knew everyone in the class. At the present time, when they had PE in high school, there were students from different classes and she did not know a single one of them. Thus, now she felt uncomfortable and could not live up to be the same PE student as she was during upper elementary school.

One male participant (6) gave another aspect of the group dynamics in PE. He explained that he had two really good friends in the class which he always hanged out with. The dynamic interaction with his class mates during the PE was described like this:

[Participant]: I have two friends in the class that I usually hang out with. I think I am the one that is most, who tries hardest to be a bit more quiet. We start chatting very easily during the lesson, and one of us is especially good at saying stupid comments sometimes to everything. I am probably associated with them so we become a group. Rather, you do not want to be seen like that because then you will get grade after that as well.

[Researcher]: ok, so how do you think that the three of you are perceived by others?

[Participant]: very fuzzy and noisy. But on the PE I do not think it is really the same. Then you are doing something. Because when you are sitting on the Swedish lessons, for instance, when you sit
and read or write essay for instance, then it is very easy to start to chat. Here you run and move, so it is not noticeable in the same way so to say.

[Researcher]: so there are not the same possibilities to chat during the PE?
[Participant]: exactly, or well yes, maybe, maybe if you are on the same team or something
[Researcher]: ok, but you still experience that even though the three of you are closely connected you are still doing your best?
[Participant]: yes I do, especially in the presence of the teacher. [his two friends passes by, leaving the PE lesson, running and laughing]…now they are going out for a smoke, that is so fucking typical…I try to show the teacher that I am responsible and that I do care more, like a fawner, when the teacher is looking at you then you look back and do not talk to someone else. But really I am trying not to talk to them, I really do everything I can but it always ends up that one is talking anyway.

The last subcategory in the social dimension is social comparison. This category comprises two different aspects. First, some of the physically active male participants with really good physical abilities saw themselves as superior to their classmates (participants 1, 3, 4 & 8). One participant (4), a physically active male, wanted the PE lessons to be divided in two groups; one for the athletic superior students and one for the athletic inferior students. Participant 3 whished that those who are not athletes or good at sports should do something else during the PE lessons because they just ruined the activities and wasted their own and others time. Opinions like this were not expressed by the physically inactive participants or the physically active females.

The second aspect was about social evaluation. Some participants (2, 5, 6 & 7) stated that they did not like the evaluations that they were exposed to during the PE. From this motive (i.e., prevent social evaluation) some of the participant liked team sports better and some liked individual exercises better. Those who liked team sports better thought that it was easier to hide their individual performances in a team. Whereas those who did not like team sports thought they ruined the whole team’s performance and thus increasing their exposure to social evaluation through team sports. Those who were concerned over the social evaluation were especially the physically less active participants. The physically active students were not negative to social evaluation and one of them saw performance results connected to grades (i.e., you have to jump 4,50 meters to get a the highest grade) as the best feedback one can get.
5 Discussion

5.1 Summary of results

The objective of the study was to investigate what factors that compose the construct of physical education in high school students. The result showed that four major factors composed the construct of PE. The different factors were called dimensions in the result presentation because they did per se include a number of subcategories. The dimensions were: Athletic dimensions including the sub-categories Biography of sports and Increased self-efficacy; Body and gender dimensions including Body awareness, Gender and Physical ability; Scholastic dimensions including Ambitious in school, Skewed image of PE and The PE teacher; Social dimensions including Identification with other dimensions, Group belonging and identification with class mates, and Social comparison.

5.2 Result discussion

Each dimension will be discussed separately under its respective headline. However, this does not inhibit the discussion to be inter-dimensional. The discussion will include both literature from the introduction but also new literature that can enrich the results and analysis.

5.2.1 Athletic dimensions

The two subcategories in the athletic dimension had strong connection to each other; by logical reasons. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1986), is "people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute a course of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). High self-efficacy in exercise settings has, for instance, shown to have major positive influence on initiation and maintenance of exercise behaviors (Buckworth & Dishman, 2002); and self-efficacy is generally seen as a strong precursor of human behavior (Caprara & Cervone, 2000). Self-efficacy can alter with a couple of variables. The variable which has highest influence on the level self-efficacy is mastery experience (i.e., that one has accomplished the task successfully before) (Weinburg & Gould, 2003). If an individual has been able to execute a set of specific
behaviors, in a specific situation, successfully many times before, the individual will have a high self-efficacy when facing that situation again. According to the results, a biography of extramural sports seemed to increase the perceived self-efficacy in PE.

However, why does a biography of extramural sports increase self-efficacy in PE? Athletic identity has been defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p 237). Active involvement in sports is figured to nurture and give strength to athletic identity (Brewer, et al., 2000). In turn, a stronger athletic identity leads to more active involvement in sports. Thus, there is a circular relationship between involvement in sports and athletic identity. According to participant 2, due to her involvement in extramural sports she was always well prepared to do whatever the content of the PE lessons were. She had never been afraid of doing any exercises on the PE lessons and had never experienced any negative emotions prior to physically demanding PE lessons as her friends had. To see her experience from a perspective of Burke’s (1991) cybernetic theory it becomes apparent that the PE elicited behaviors that were congruent with her athletic identity. Thus, in the PE setting participant 2 enacted the same behaviors as in the extramural sports. Due to her prior positive experience in extramural sports she logically had high self-efficacy in that setting. That situation specific self-efficacy was then generalized to include the PE setting as well. Thus, to her, PE and extramural sports was the cause to the same self-efficacy and thus included the same content.

5.2.2 Body and gender dimensions

Body and gender in sports settings is a subject under constant investigation (see for instance, Buckworth & Dishman, 2002; Martin Ginis, Lindwall & Prapavessis, 2007) The body has a significant role in the human psyche. Fox (1998) captures the role of the body as follows:

The body provides the vehicle through which we interface with life. Through embodiment, we explore, learn, present ourselves, and express our sexuality; and through its appearance, the physical self becomes a central element of the whole self. Our perceptions of our physical selves therefore provide a key to understanding the constitution of our identities, the basis of our self-esteem, and many of our behavior patterns (p.295).

The two girls that mentioned increases in body awareness during PE, evaluated this as negative. During PE the body was exposed to other individuals which made the
physical self-concept appear more negative. According to a study of Westerståhl, Barnekow-Bergkvist, Hedberg and Jansson (2003), adolescent girls felt more anxious about PE classes in 1995 compared to in 1974. At the same time, they were more satisfied with their performances during the classes in 1995 than in 1974. No similar relations were detected, under any conditions, for boys. Lindwall (2004) emphasize that the result from the study of Westerståhl et al., (2003) can be seen as an indicator of increasing fear of evaluation of the physique. This kind of fear is explained and described by the concept of Social physique anxiety which is defined as: “a subtype of social anxiety that occurs as a result of the prospect or interpersonal evaluation involving one’s physique” (Hart, Leary & Rejeski, 1989, p. 96).

However, participant 7, who had rather big problems with exposing her body in PE settings, experienced no such problems when deliberately exercising at the gym. Even though she recognized that there were other people present when she exercised at the gym these others did not affect her to the same extent as her classmates did during PE. She expressed fear of both evaluation of her body size (i.e., that her classmates should see her as fat) and her gender (i.e., that her classmates should see her as a “tomboy” when doing sports) during PE but not at the gym. This raises questions. According to the concept of social physique anxiety, the interpersonal evaluation of participant 7’s physique during PE provokes unpleasant feelings within her. This is in line with the sociometer theory of self-esteem (Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), which emphasize the evaluations of others to be the antecedent of internal evaluation processes in individuals. However, the theory does not seem to be enough to give a detailed explanation of the experience of participant 7. When analyzing her statement, both the physical situation and the type of interpersonal interaction can be possible mediators of the experience of interpersonal evaluation. Thus, in the PE setting, including the specific interpersonal evaluation in that setting, her body awareness increased and the evaluation of her physique was negative. These problems were not present in the gym setting including the interpersonal relations in that setting.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that the interpersonal evaluation of one’s physique actually is constructed in the individual’s mind; yet influenced by interpersonal processes. Thus, the evaluation that can affect the concept of one’s physique is always made by the one whose body it concerns. Nevertheless, this evaluation is strongly influenced by cues from interpersonal interaction. For instance, others’ evaluation of participant 7’s physique must not differ between the PE and the
gym setting. Yet, participant 7 interprets these settings differently even though she cannot know how or if others evaluate her. The “evaluators” are thus not always plain evaluators. The interpersonal interaction, which operates as the cue for self-evaluation, must therefore be seen in its contexts and from its specific characteristics. Maybe one has to know and have a personal relation to the evaluators to feel evaluated.

5.2.3 Scholastic dimensions

The social dimension *Identification with other dimensions* will be discussed with the scholastic dimensions and the scholastic dimension *The PE teacher* will be discussed under social dimensions.

Even though participant 5 did not consider herself to be preoccupied with her own health, (rather she perceived herself as not physically active and a person who enjoys spending time on the couch eating candy), she felt a responsibility to make an effort on the PE lessons. She wanted to become a veterinary and thus needed high grades to be admitted to the veterinary education. Even though she did not have a genuine interest neither in PE nor in extramural sports she was ambitious in school and did her best in PE. Logically there should be some relation between how one behaves in school, i.e., a schema for scholastic factors, and behavior during PE. However, according to NU03 (Skolverket, 2005) no such relation was detected. Further, NU03 detected a relationship between involvement in extramural sports and “commitment” to PE, which is not the case of participant 5.

According to McCall and Simmons (1978) the variance in a role identity depends on the idiosyncratic versus conventional proportion every person has of a particular role. One person must have more than one role identity. Therefore the roles must be organized in a hierarchy with the most prominent and “ideal self” identity on the top. The prominence of the identity is determined by the degree to which one: (1) gets support from others for an identity; (2) is committed to the identity; and (3) receives extrinsic and intrinsic rewards from the role identity (McCall & Simmons). An identity is more likely to be activated in a situation if it has more prominence. Applied to participant 5, her role identity as (good)”student” rules out the role identity as “not physically active” due to the different prominence of the two identities. Thus, it is rather complicated, from this perspective, to change the prominence of a role identity and consequently its congruent behavior enactment.
Stryker (1980) sees the role identity as organized in a hierarchy based on the salience of the identity. The salience of an identity depends on the degree of commitment one has to the identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). The commitment has two aspects: a quantitative and a qualitative. The quantitative portion of identity is decided by the number of human connections one has through one particular identity. More human connections through a particular identity equal higher commitment to that identity. The qualitative aspect of the identity refers to the strength and depth in the connections to others through an identity. The commitment to an identity is higher when the ties to others through the identity in question are stronger.

Both theories can provide possible explanations for participant 5’s behavior during PE. However, both theories are actually pretty simplistic and do not account for the inner process of behavior enactment as for instance Burke’s cybernetic theory (1991). In turn, Burke’s theory does not account for the relation between identities. Not even the hierarchical and multifaceted self-concept model by Marsh and Shavelson (1985) can account for the relation between role identities. The authors capture the notion that the different dimensions of life are distinguished from each other and organized in an, for the individual, unique hierarchy. However, the result of Marsh and Shavelson totally neglects individuals’ sense of unity and sameness; which are the true meaning of identity (Phinney, 1993). Participant 5, for instance, insisted that she felt like the same person all the time even though she behaved a little bit differently depending on context. Thus, the actual organization of the self, as shown by Marsh and Shavelson, differ from individuals’ actual self-perception.

The collision of two role identities can also be seen in the case of participant 2. She prioritized extra work before her PE classes even though she saw it as “better” to prioritize PE. She argued that the social pressure from her boss made her prioritize her work before PE. This participant had always had highest grade possible in PE and perceived high self-efficacy in PE as well. However, something made her prioritize work. One variable of the explanation could be her group identity during PE that we turn to next in the discussion.

5.2.4 Social dimensions

Participant 2 did not feel very comfortable with her present classmates. In upper elementary school she knew all her classmates and she had been a leader with high
confidence. Now, when she had PE in high school, there were students from different classes and she did not know a single one of them. Seen from the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) a group identity is possessed when the individuals in a group have at least one characteristic in common, which distinguishes them from others. Even though participant 2 obviously misses a social identity in the class, this might not be the whole explanation of her discomfort during PE. According to Brewer (1991), people do not always want to emphasize group membership. In Brewer’s theory of optimal distinctiveness it is claimed that people are searching for sameness in groups but, in the same time, they want to be seen as distinct individuals in the group they are members of. This is two conflicting motives that have to be balanced to reach, what Brewer calls, optimal distinctiveness. In large groups each individual member is striving for distinctiveness because of the oversatisfaction of sameness. However, in smaller groups, where distinctiveness is oversatisfied, group members are striving for sameness. Thus, the balance between distinctiveness and sameness might not have been satisfying to participant 2.

Due to her prior experience of “high status” in PE in upper elementary school, this state might have developed into a kind of self-guide (Higgins, 1987, 1989) and identity standard (Burke, 1991) for PE. As she cannot enact identity congruent behavior during the PE anymore her extra work might be valued higher and thus also prioritized before PE.

Another significant element of identification during the PE was the PE teacher. The former PE teacher of participant 4 was a bodybuilder and thus shared the same interest as participant 4. Their shared characteristic can be seen as a constructed group identity (Tajfel, 1981), which worked as a motivator for the participant. However, when he could not live up to the shared characteristic (i.e., when they should do cardiovascular tests on the PE and he was not in a good shape) he actually withdrew from the class. This is a problematic situation because the identification with the PE teacher seems to, as a double edged sword, have the ability to both increase and decrease motivation for PE.

Another double edged sword was the problem of social comparison which could both facilitate and inhibit attitude towards PE. Social comparison is one of the psychological mechanisms that can alter self-esteem (Lindwall, 2004). Self-esteem is defined as a person’s appraisal of his or her own value (Leary & Baumeister, 2000); even though there is ambiguousness about the concept (Mruk, 2006). However, the level of
importance attributed to a specific dimension in the self-concept will determine the level of influence the dimension competence has on the self-esteem (Harter, 1990; James, 1890/1948; Rosenberg, 1979). Thus, incompetence in a dimension with low perceived importance is unlikely to affect the self-esteem of a person. Vice versa, high competence in a dimension with high perceived importance will increase the self-esteem. Even though it is not possible to see significant differences in a qualitative study (see the method discussion) the pattern of the result of this study showed that the physically active males that were involved into extramural sports did not experience any problems with social comparison as the other participants did. The participants that were involved in extra mural sports and were physically active increased their self-esteem through social comparison during PE but the others did not. Apparently this reveals something about the content of the PE lessons.

5.3 Method discussion and limitations of the study

When investigating identity, there are, as in any other research areas, both advantages and disadvantages by using one methodological approach (Mitchell & Jolley, 2007). The objective of the present study was of explorative nature why the researcher chose to utilize a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach made the researcher able to investigate the construct of PE “deeply” and “nuanced”. The result emerged directly from the participants’ unconstraint narratives and could therefore contain knowledge that had not been explored in prior studies. The participants could describe their thoughts, feelings and behaviors in relation to PE without limitations from predetermined answer alternatives as in a survey study. However, from a qualitative approach it is not possible to detect significant relationships or differences between groups. There are interesting results of this study that could be even more interesting with statistical data.

The study embraced mostly a cross-sectional design with features of retrospection. One of the advantages with a cross-sectional design is that the results do not have sources of errors due to decay in participants’ memories. The participants can answer from their present, nearest future and past states. However, the retrospective part of the study gave interesting aspects to the result. Even better would be if the study could embrace a prospective design. To be able to follow the participants over a period of time
could have provided interesting results about identity change and changes in participants’ construction of PE.

Another limitation of the study is the sample. Even though a heterogeneous sample was wanted and to some extent found, it is difficult to generalize the result (as usual in qualitative studies) to the population of high school students. To do this a larger sample followed by statistical analysis would have been required. The variables that directed the sample, and where variations were wanted, were school, gender and physical activity. However, more variables could have been altered to get a more heterogeneous sample (e.g., socio economic status, religious believes, ethnicity). Thus, the sample of the study does probably affect the conclusions drawn.

In qualitative studies there is a risk that the analysis will be biased by the researcher. Even though three independent individuals, except the researcher, inspected the data, objectivity is hard to reach. However, objectivity might not always be the most interesting to find. The knowledge the researcher had when starting the study can be just as much a resource (e.g., finding more interesting results), as a barrier (e.g., decreased objectivity).

5.4 Future research

To come further in the investigated area a different design could be beneficial to embrace. A prospective design where the researcher can follow and interact with the participants during a period of time could be fruitful. Such a design could for instance investigate how the construct of PE and its sub-dimensions change over time and why they change.

A quantitative approach to the area can give interesting results concerning differences in the construct of PE and its sub-dimensions between groups (e.g., gender, extramural activity, socio economic status, etc). In addition, a quantitative approach could see relationships between different dimensions of identity and if some dimensions inhibit or facilitate the identification with other dimensions.

Another key feature of the study that would be interesting to further investigate is what mechanisms that alter the self-evaluation process. From this study one can figure that the type of interpersonal interaction is a possible mediator of the self-evaluation. However, a more detailed result describing why and when self-evaluation becomes critical to the individual would be interesting for the field of PE.
5.5 Implications

The result of the present study can hopefully help (PE) teachers to understand and interpret students’ behaviors and attitudes toward PE in a more “realistic” way. As written in the introduction, PE teachers are often, to the researcher’s knowledge, concerned about students’ behaviors and attitudes during and toward PE. The PE teachers become powerless and have problems to fulfill their own identity standard (Burke, 1991) as PE teachers. This study has shown the complexity of students’ behaviors during PE through the lens of identity. Thus, students’ behaviors during PE are not only directed by the specific lessons or the PE teacher; rather, it is a complex configuration of cognitions categorized in four major dimensions. The four dimensions can be helpful when analyzing students’ behaviors and planning interventions to alter their behaviors during PE and attitudes toward PE.

The study leaves the question how PE can be organized, constructed and conducted to attract all kinds of students open. That is a question for all PE teachers in the field. This study has shown that it is more than the plain interest for PE that determines how one behaves during the PE lessons. Due to the complex and dynamic constructs of PE in high school students, one type of PE for all students might not be the best formula to attract the students’ different PE constructs. However, the “interest and bias” of the PE teacher and the inter-subjective established image of PE might be barriers to a new content of PE.

5.6 Conclusions

The construct of PE in high school students is composed by four dimensions. They are athletic-, body and gender-, scholastic- and social dimensions. The four dimensions can be utilized by PE teachers to understand, interpret and analyze students’ behaviors during PE and attitudes toward PE. The result can also provide conclusions about higher issues of the content and organization of PE.

The PE curriculum says that the subject of PE shall strive towards a development of students’ positive self-image. However, according to the result of the present study the increased (negative) body awareness is embedded in the construction of PE. It can therefore be questionable if all students are able to develop a positive self-image in the
context of PE. PE is constructed to expose students to susceptible physical situations and constant evaluation of their body and physical abilities.

In addition, the social comparison during PE is only appreciated by the physically fit male students who are involved into extramural sports. To them, but not to others, PE is a source to increased self-esteem. Thus, it is important that the content of PE differ from the content of extramural sports if PE is supposed to attract students that are not attracted by extramural sports.
References


1. Undersökningsdeltagarens personliga identitet

(1.1 Gör en tidslinje över viktiga händelser i ditt liv!)

1.2 Vilka olika delar (identiteter) har du i ditt liv? Vilka sociala roller har du?

1.3 Vad innebär de olika rollerna? Skillnader mellan rollerna? Hur uppfattar du och andra dig i de specifika rollerna?

1.4 Vad gör du i de olika rollerna?

1.5 Agerar du annorlunda i någon roll på grund av andra roller? Påverkar rollerna varandra? Finns det någon roll som gör att inställningen till skolidrotten försämras/förbättras?

2. Idrottslig identitet utanför skolidrotten

2.1 Hur ser din idrottsbakgrund ut?

2.2 Är idrott något du känner dig tvingad till att aktivera dig i eller något som du vill aktivera dig i? Inget av det? Förklara!

3. Identitet i förhållande till skolidrotten

3.1 Hur ser din skolidrottsbakgrund ut?
Har skolidrotten varit roligare/träkigare under vissa stadier?

3.2 Hur uppfattar du dig själv i skolidrotten idag?
Vad tycker du om skolidrotten?
Hur känner du inför skolidrotten?
Hur agerar du på skolidrotten? (Är du aktiv på skolidrotten?)
Vad har du för betyg i skolidrotten? Vad gör att du har just det betyget?

3.3 Hur har du uppfattat idrottslärarna genom åren?

3.4 Hur uppfattar du dig själv i förhållande till dina klasskamrater under idrottslektionerna? Vilken roll har du i klassen under skolidrotten?