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Exploring Students' Beliefs about Physical Education and Their Use of Social Goals in Evaluating Their Achievements in the Physical Domain

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine students' social reasons for striving to achieve in the physical domain. The results are based on the responses of 78 male and 83 female middle school physical education students ranging in age from 13 to 15 years who are predominantly of European-American decent. These students provided information about (a) the amount and time they participate in physical activity, (b) how much effort they put into physical activity, and (c) their thoughts and goals related to physical activity. From the 161 original participants, 18 were invited for an interview, which was designed to follow-up on the survey questions and to gain information concerning their social reasons for striving to achieve in physical education and physical activity.

Students enjoyed physical education, thought it was important to do well, and tried hard in class. They also indicated that physical education should involve being with friends and meeting new friends. In the qualitative data analysis, four main socially-related themes developed, indicating that:

(a) having friends in physical education made it more fun,

(b) having friends in physical education reduced feelings of isolation and enhanced a sense of belonging,

(c) some students tried harder in the presence of their friends, while others were less effortful, and

(d) having athletic friends tended to influence the amount of effort students exerted in physical education.

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