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**Young women's negotiation of  
multiple fields of femininity and  
physicality in physical  
activity and Physical Education in an  
international school in Taiwan**

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
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## **Abstract**

Gender research over the past three decades has emphasised the socially constructed nature of experience in physical activity. Numerous studies have explored the influence of cultural, social, economic and political influences on young women's understandings of their bodies, physical activity, sport and physical education, although this research is limited to a focus on the western context. As a New Zealand physical education teacher in an international school in Taiwan, I set out to investigate the physical activity experiences of young women attending this school and the associated implications for teaching physical education. My study involved a focus group and in-depth interviews with four young women. I adopted a Bourdieudian approach in my data analysis in order to investigate ways in which the young women negotiated norms, rules, practices and expectations of femininity and physicality within and across multiple fields. A significant presence of an 'Asian mindset' was highlighted, which presented a focus on academic achievement and traditional Taiwanese forms of appropriate femininity and physicality. Resulting valuation systems often conflicted with those present in the physical education class. The findings revealed young women negotiated these value systems through various means. Some chose to accept and embody these values limiting their engagement in physical education, while other young women were empowered to challenge them, enhancing their engagement in physical education. This study contributes to gender and physical education research as it offers a perspective of the diverse nature of young women's experiences in physical activity within a non-western context.

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# CONTENTS

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Contents.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
 <b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	 <b>1</b>
My interest in this study .....	1
Significance of this study .....	5
Outline of thesis.....	5
Summary .....	6
 <b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	 <b>7</b>
The international school environment .....	7
Third culture kids .....	9
Taiwanese youth: Growing up in Taiwan in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.....	11
Gender and physical activity .....	17
Young women and physical education.....	20
Young women, culture and physical activity .....	26
Summary.....	29
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	 <b>31</b>
Theoretical framework .....	31
Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, field and capital.....	34
Ethical considerations.....	39
Participants .....	40
Data collection.....	41
Data analysis and reporting .....	46
Validity .....	52
Summary.....	55

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>56</b>
Fictional Tales of Young Women and Physical Activity in Taiwan:	
Seven Stories .....	58
Making meaning of young women’s physical activity experiences in Taiwan:	
A theoretical discussion.....	67
Being a physically active female/male in a global community .....	71
Motives and constraints in young women’s physical activity participation.....	77
The young women’s negotiation of the world in which they live .....	87
Summary .....	92
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....</b>	 <b>93</b>
 <b>REFERENCES .....</b>	 <b>98</b>
 <b>APPENDICES .....</b>	 <b>115</b>
Appendix One: Principal and Head of Department information sheet.....	115
Appendix Two: Principal’s consent form.....	117
Appendix Three: Introductory letter.....	118
Appendix Four: Participant’s consent form .....	120
Appendix Five: Parent information sheet.....	121
Appendix Six: Parent’s consent form.....	123
Appendix Seven: Focus group questions .....	124
Appendix Eight: Email to female students in Grade 10 .....	125
Appendix Nine: In-depth interview guide .....	126
Appendix Nine: Prompting images .....	129

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The social setting of young women living in Taiwan and attending an international school .....	38
Figure 2.0: Prompting image of a muscular Asian young woman.....	129
Figure 2.1: Prompting image of a slim Asian young female model.....	129
Figure 2.3: Prompting image of a muscular Western young woman.....	129
Figure 2.4: Prompting image of a muscular Asian young man .....	130
Figure 2.5: Prompting image of a thin Western young man.....	130

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## *My interest in this study*

After completing a Bachelor of Physical Education (PE) degree and teaching in New Zealand for two years I moved to Taiwan where I have taught PE for the last four years at an international school (IST). The combination of living in an Asian city, teaching in an international school, and working with internationally diverse teachers, students and parents has lead to an intriguing array of daily experiences and interactions. My assumptions of social, cultural and gender norms have been constantly challenged. This thesis presents my journey through a research project aimed at developing my understanding of cultural and gendered complexities in the lives of young women attending IST, the influence this has on their understandings of physical activity and the ways in which this affects their experiences in PE. The following narrative introduces the complex nature of the social setting in which these students live and I currently teach.

## **An early morning walk to school in Taiwan**

The elevator dings as it comes to a stop at the ground floor. I walk out of my apartment building into the glaring morning sunshine. I glance at my watch, 7:00am, good, I am right on time. The sky is clear and there is no wind, a sure sign it's going to reach at least 38 degrees on the field today.

I can just make out the faint sound of floating, high pitch Chinese music as I near the end of my alley. Turning into a lane, I near a local park and the music gets louder. In the park I see a group of elderly women and men dressed in matching long crisp white pants and red polo shirts moving slowly in unison through a tai-chi sequence. The music is coming from a small crackling tape recorder. There doesn't seem to be a leader, they all know what to do. Several scooters zoom by followed by a mini bus filled with chatting children. The elderly group continues on uninterrupted.



As I cross over onto the main street and start to head down the hill, the music fades. I walk past several bustling food stalls selling traditional Taiwanese breakfast meals of steamed buns, fried bread, watery rice with seaweed, and soybean milk, before stopping at a set of traffic lights alongside a bus. Its entire side is covered with the image of a blonde western looking woman with long, skinny legs advertising a new brand of jeans. The bus pulls away, I see another image on the back advertising a corset that enhances breast size.

The traffic lights change and I cross the street into the shade of larger buildings. On the pavement in front of a clothing store a middle aged Asian man is dropping paper money into a small metal drum and watching it burn. Tiny glowing flakes of paper float up out of the drum, dancing briefly on the breeze before disappearing; cars and scooters continue to zoom by.

Almost at the bottom of the hill I near the California Fitness Club. Walking past the entrance, the polished doors slide open and I am blasted with a stream of cold air and thumping music. A bright billboard next to the entrance displays a muscular Asian man holding up a slim Asian woman an attempt to entice people passing by to enter their doors.

At the bottom of the hill I walk out of the shadows of the buildings into the bright sunlight again. I am now part of a moving throng of people. Several women around me pop open umbrellas to shade themselves from the sunlight. I am temporarily overwhelmed by the clip clopping of high heels and the zooming of scooters. Crossing the final street before arriving at school I can smell the burning incense from the little temple nestled in between a cell phone shop and KFC on the street corner.

Walking towards the school gate I have the high brick perimeter fence on one side of me and a line of incredibly shiny cars on the other. Children are stepping out of these cars, expertly balancing swollen backpacks, laptop bags and awkwardly shaped instrument cases. Today I enter the gate alongside a Pilippino nanny and a young child who is pulling on her hand with excitement. I greet the gate guards, “zao” (good morning) as they check my ID and walk through the

entrance courtyard, glad to be under the shade of the overhanging trees. The trees have big looping ropes connecting them to the pillars behind. Assuming that a typhoon warning has been given for a few days time, I make a mental note to check it out when I get to my office and walk on into the school lobby.

The sun streaming through the windows above brightens the colours of the numerous flags hanging from the overlooking second floor railing. These flags represent the many nationalities of those present and those who have passed through our school over the years. I can make out the animated conversation of some Philippino nannies catching up in the corner of the room, along with the conversations of groups of students chatting in Mandarin, Japanese, Korean and English. Teachers are also filing in amongst the students, heading to the snack bar for a quick coffee before the lessons begin. There is such an assortment of accents and individuals, American, Canadian, Indian, Australian, Taiwanese, Japanese, British, French and New Zealanders.

As I head to my office I pass students hanging out on the cafeteria benches. A group of three girls and one boy are huddled over the latest issue of Seventeen sipping Starbucks. Another group of boys are taking turns at bouncing a tennis ball against the brick wall. Other groups have their laptops out and are playing multi-player games over the net, while others are flicking through Facebook and laughing as they check out each other's embarrassing pictures while listening to their iPods. In the snack bar some students are scattered amongst the coffee drinking teachers; some of these students appear to be flicking through text books and notes, desperately finishing last minute homework tasks.

Passing a table packed with seniors, I am impressed by their ability to eat, txt, and converse in Mandarin and English simultaneously. They seem to negotiate the complexities of this environment both in and outside of the school walls with ease. I think to myself these are amazing students.

-

When I first arrived in Taiwan, my daily walks to school were pretty exciting as I witnessed new sights, sounds and smells. Multiple languages, ever changing technology, cultural and religious practices, gender ideals, and multinational friendships were just a few of the many features of these students' everyday lives. The combination, and sometimes clash, of Taiwanese and Western ways of life intrigued me.

As a physical educator I am interested in student understanding of, and experiences in physical activity and PE. Throughout my own involvement in physical activity as a female student, PE teacher, coach, and athlete, I have been fortunate to have had many positive experiences. However, I am aware that many other females do not experience physical activity and PE in the same way. For some young women, PE classes are a source of anxiety, frustration and embarrassment and/or disappointment. Given the diversity of females' experiences in physical activity and PE it is difficult to know the extent of the many social, historical, cultural, political and economic factors which influence understandings of physical activity and experiences in PE. The influence of these factors being especially complex in this international school as they encompass both Western and Taiwanese elements. Thus, in this project I seek to gain a better understanding of young women's lived experiences with regard to physical activity and PE. The following research questions guided my investigation:

1. How do socio-cultural contextual factors influence how young women living in Taiwan and attending an international school understand and experience physical activity?
2. How do these factors shape female student's experiences of physical education?

This study will add to the existing field of research by investigating how girls' experiences in physical activity and PE are shaped and influenced by broader cultural and social practices and what this means for teaching practices at an international school. It is my hope that this knowledge contributes to my own understanding and teaching practices, but also that of other teachers working in international schools or working with students from different cultures.

### ***Significance of this study***

This research addresses several major gaps in the existing literature in the field of physical activity, PE, gender and cultural studies. First, numerous studies examine the complexities of the international school setting (Allen, 2002; Gellar, 2002; Hill, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Sylvester, 2002), however, little is known about the influence such complexities have on young women's experiences in physical activity and PE. Second, whilst several studies suggest traditional expectations of a women's place in Taiwanese society continue to be deeply embedded in Taiwanese culture (Chiang, 2000; Lin, 2008; Yu, Liaw & Barnd, 2004), little is known about the influence of these expectations on young women's understandings of and experiences in physical activity and PE. Third, extensive research has examined the influence of recent cultural, social, and economic changes on young women's understandings of, and experiences in, physical activity and PE (Azzarito, Solomon, & Harrison, 2006; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Hills, 2007; Koski, 2008; Wright, 1999); however, much of this research has been conducted within a Western context. Lastly, whilst there is a growing body of literature focused on international students, otherwise known as 'third culture kids' (Allen, 2002; Eidse & Sichel, 2004; Haywood, 2002; Langford, 1998; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), and their experiences of cultural dissonance, there is no apparent literature which specifically examines 'third culture kids' experiences in physical activity and PE. My research provides insight into the physical activity experiences of third culture females, living in Taiwan, attending an international American school, consequently exploring new understandings of young women in relation to physical activity and PE. This project examines the influence of such socio-cultural factors in an Asian context, thus, providing additional insight in this field of inquiry.

### ***Outline of thesis***

This thesis consists of five chapters. A review of literature follows this introduction as the second chapter. This review investigates existing work in the field of international schools, Taiwanese youth, hybridity, and globalization studies. It then more specifically focuses on literature in the field of physical activity, PE, gender and cultural studies. In chapter three I discuss my methods

and poststructural feminist theoretical approach. This includes details of the focus group and in-depth interview process, my use of narrative inquiry, issues of validity, and my application of a Bourdieudian approach which informed analysis. In chapter four I detail the research findings in the form of narratives that resulted from the focus group and in-depth interviews. I then draw upon theoretical concepts and previous research as I discuss the findings of this study with regard to contemporary perspectives in the field of physical activity, PE, gender and cultural studies. I conclude this thesis in chapter five by summarising the main research findings of this study and discussing their implications for practice in regards to creating positive learning experiences for young ‘third culture’ women in PE.

### ***Summary***

The narrative offered at the start of this introduction ‘An early morning walk to school in Taiwan’ provided a glimpse into the complex environment in which the students in this research live and I currently teach. The young women in focus in this research have to negotiate a plethora of social and cultural norms, practices and expectations on a daily basis, which consequentially influence their experiences in physical activity. The unique nature of the environment in which these students live, and its influence on their lives, fascinates me and was the inspiration for this project. Unique gender, cultural and social dimensions of the world in which the students live are explored in the following chapter. This is followed by a more specific review of literature in the field of physical activity, PE, gender and cultural studies.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the introductory chapter, I highlighted some of the complexities of the environment in which international school students live. In this chapter I further explore the unique nature of international schools and what it means to be a young woman living in Taiwan. More specifically, I examine themes of cultural and gendered expectations as well as hybrid identities. I then examine these themes and how they relate to young women's experiences in physical activity and physical education (PE) through a review of current literature in this field of study.

### *The international school environment*

The concept of international education initially developed after World War I as a result of the realization of the devastation war between nation states can cause (Gellar, 2002; Sylvester, 2002). The concept of internationalism as a counter balance to nationalism was promoted by liberal-thinking people at the time. As Gellar (2002) explains:

As an essential element in pursuing and maintaining world peace, the education of the young, which focused on how nations and peoples can work in harmony to achieve international cooperation and understanding, became an important means by which to achieve this balance (p. 30)

In 1924 the first International school was formed in Geneva with these aims in mind. As other international schools were established throughout the world during the 1950s and 1960s, the initial ethical aims began to be sidelined. This was largely due to the growing need to educate the increasing number of children of the internationally mobile diplomatic and business communities (Gellar, 2002; Hill, 2002).

Today an 'international school' is difficult to define. Hayden (1998) argues that international schools are a "disparate group" of institutions which lack clarity in regards to consensus about, "what they actually are, the relationship between the schools themselves and the international education many of them profess to offer" (p. 3). Pollock and Van Reken (2001) loosely define an

international school as, “any school that has students from various countries and whose primary curriculum is different from the one used by the national schools of the host country” (p. 229). Hill (2002) suggests that some international schools can be defined as ‘internationally-minded’ (reflecting the initial aim of international schools) whereas others are not. The school in focus in this study reflects several elements of each of the aforementioned definitions. Not only is IST populated by students and teachers from various countries but as the stated purpose of the school is to provide an “American based education with a global perspective” (IST Annual Report, 2008, p. 4), its curriculum is both internationally minded and different from the national curriculum of Taiwan.

International schools often reside in complex communities which provide many challenges for its teachers, students, board of trustees and parents (Allen, 2002). Allen (2002) defines communities as, “symbolic constructs founded on some kind of common culture through shared values” (p. 130). He recognises that not only is a school a community, but it also exists in communities, serves communities, forms communities and interacts with communities. The community of IST can be seen to consist of a complex combination of various cultural groups, values and influences. Although the latest IST annual report (2009), lists the four largest student groups by passport as American 67%, Canadian 9%, Korean 8%, and Japanese 4% (p. 4), when walking the hallways it is impossible to differentiate such ethnically and culturally distinct groups within the student body. For example many students come from mixed families where the parents are from not only different ethnic groups but also hold different cultural values. Furthermore, although the school was originally founded on and continues to be influenced by an American curriculum and American values in order to meet the needs of expat families, social and economic conditions now mean that the majority of students predominantly come from upper class, urban Taiwanese families and although many of these students hold American passports they have spent very little time in America. Essentially the IST community might best be described as a combination of American educational values, upper class, urban Taiwanese values and the various and diverse home/family values.

### ***Third culture kids***

Student negotiation of different norms and values within and across various communities (e.g., family, local community, international school) often presents challenges as young people attempt to make sense of their cultural identity (Allen, 2002). Students in this research daily negotiate the challenges of living in one country (Taiwan) while being educated in another country's educational system (America). Such students have been labelled 'third culture kids' (TCK). This term coined by sociologist Ruth Useem in the 1960's has since been adopted and advanced by numerous contemporary researchers studying international education (e.g., Allen, 2002; Eidse & Sichel, 2004; Haywood, 2002; Langford, 1998; Pollock and Van Reken, 2001). A TCK can be defined as,

a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 19)

As TCK's, many of the students at IST are "raised in a neither/nor world" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 6). They operate not in their parents' culture, but constantly negotiate multiple cultural spaces in which they are raised. For example, students at IST attend an American school, with peers from many different cultural backgrounds (e.g. Taiwan, America, Canada, Japan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand), they are taught by teachers from many different cultural backgrounds (e.g. Taiwan, America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), and they pass to and from school through an inner city Taiwanese community, to their homes in which they may speak a range of languages, and embrace a variety of cultural values. Essentially when in the international school environment IST students are influenced by American/Western societal expectations, norms and values; but in many cases at home or in the local community they are influenced by Taiwanese societal expectations, norms and values. Allen (2002) suggests that this 'cultural distance' between the school and its immediate environment can result in many challenges for students and teachers alike. Such challenges include feeling like they don't belong, struggling



with different cultural expectations as well as the experience of cultural dissonance, and culture shock on expatriation and repatriation (Eidse & Sichel, 2004; Langford, 1998; McCluskey, 1994; Pearce, 1998; Voegele, 2003; Walker, 1998).

One strategy TCK's use to negotiate these different worlds is the development of cultural adaptability (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Pollock and Van Reken (2001) describe the 'chameleon' like, hybrid tendencies of TCKs as they easily switch, "language, style of relating, appearance, and cultural practices to take on the characteristics needed to blend better into the current scene" (p. 92). Lim's (2004) summary of the post-war production of Asian American gendered public culture provides insight into the concept of hybridity in an Asian American identity. Lim (2004) describes how Asian American female youth have fluctuated between public displays of assimilation into white, middle class America and Asian ethnic pride forming a sense of cultural hybridity. In so doing, Asian American female youth meld and show "both Asian and American cultural traits" (Lim, 2004, p. 108). Such hybrid identities are displayed by students at IST as they switch between American and Taiwanese languages, relationships and cultural practices depending on the social space they are in at any given time.

Although TCKs can use hybridity as a tool to 'meld' or 'change colours' to help them fit into day to day circumstances, Pollock and Van Reken (2001) also note that hybridity often brings challenges in relation to cultural identity, "Some TCKs who flip-flop back and forth between various behavioural patterns have trouble figuring out their own value system from the multicultural mix they have been exposed to" (p. 93). Although there is a growing body of literature on TCK's experiences of cultural dissonance in general, little is known specifically about how TCK's negotiate gender, cultural and social norms in relation to physical activity and the impact this has on PE. As third culture kids, the young women in my research face many challenges as they negotiate the cultural distance in and across various social settings (e.g., school, home, local community, global youth culture). The following section investigates the broader challenges facing young women living in Taiwan today.

### ***Taiwanese youth: Growing up in Taiwan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century***

Although English language research that focuses specifically on Taiwanese youth is limited, it is apparent from the wider body of research that young people living in Taiwan today face a very different world to that which their parents grew up in. Modern technology, industrialization and the lifting of Martial Law have contributed towards many societal changes. In the following section I will discuss the impact these changes have on the lifestyles, values and opportunities of young people in Taiwan. I will then focus more specifically on the impact these societal changes have on young women in Taiwan today.

#### **Taiwanese youth today**

Major societal developments in Taiwan with regard to family structure, gender relations, educational opportunities and globalization, have had a considerable impact upon contemporary youth. Focusing on the effect that economic and political changes in Taiwan have had on young people, Young (2001) suggests three types of youth subculture have developed. These include: 1) Alienation; (young people who do not question problems existing in society); 2) Active behaviourism; (optimists who initiate positive change in society); and 3) indifference-utilitarianism (young people who are easily influenced but hold an indifferent attitude towards society, pursuing pragmatic life satisfaction). Young (1991) believes that when societies, such as Taiwan, become more industrialized, indifference-utilitarianist youth become more prevalent. Young (1991) suggests that rapid social change over the past forty years in Taiwan has lead to a utilitarian social climate in which young people are inclined to do anything to get what they want, “Social restraint, self-control and action for glory are gradually replaced by self-indulgence and sensation seeking” (p. 66).

Whilst Young (1991) believes that attitudes of Taiwanese youth have evolved, others suggest that family structure and function in Taiwan has also changed as a result of social change over the past forty years (Liu, 2002; Yu, Liaw & Barnd, 2004). According to Liu (2002), the traditional extended family has been replaced by the nuclear family. As Nayak and Kehily (2008) rightly point out, this phenomenon is not limited to the Taiwanese context. In ‘modern’ society in general, the modern nuclear unit is “superseding the large extended families of

previous generations” (Nayak & Kehily, 2008, p. 64). In Taiwan, however, Liu (2002) believes these changes have resulted in a weakened family structure which decreases support for young people. In addition to this, increasing numbers of women have moved into the workforce in Taiwan as it is no longer an expectation that a mother’s role is to stay home. Liu (2002) suggests that as a result, mother-youth relationships are changing. She deems this to be problematic as these changes often result in parents attempting to provide a plentiful material life in the place of attention.

Education is of high importance in contemporary Taiwan society. Yu et al., (2004) indicate that in Taiwanese culture there is a hierarchy in the type of job a person acquires reflecting social status. As such, academic pursuits in order to achieve a highly regarded occupation are paramount. According to Liu (2002), many parents in Taiwan hold to the belief that a major part of successful parenting is to highly educate their children. This belief has a strong impact on young peoples’ perceptions of education, “they [parents] impose such beliefs upon their children to the extent that most youth would regard academic performance as the only criteria of success” (Liu, 2002, p. 68). Parents in the IST community place considerable emphasis on the importance of being accepted into prestigious American colleges. This in turn often results in intense academic pressure throughout the students’ school years in order to gain the grades to be considered for a spot at one of these institutions. Little is known about how these pressures impact on students in IST; in particular their enjoyment of physical activity and the importance they place on PE. Liu (2002) suggests the overemphasis of academic performance by schools and families is often to the detriment of students who may have interests in other areas. In sum, Liu (2002) deems academic related problems arising from this intense pressure to succeed a major issue of youth adjustment in Taiwan.

Cultural elements of globalization in Taiwan also have a significant influence on the lives of young people in Taiwan today. Nayak and Kehily (2008) describe globalization as, “the ‘shrinking’ of time and space and the compression of world relations into a single market” (p. 24). Elements of globalization can serve to accentuate particular cultural practices, submerge others and in some

situations create an environment in which new practices can be produced (Nayak & Kehily, 2008). The young people in this research are indeed immersed in a global culture which combines, contrasts, and sometimes clashes with Eastern (e.g., home, local community) and Western (e.g. school) ways of life.

When highlighting the challenges that emerge in the interaction of Eastern and Western cultures Nayak and Kehily (2008) draw attention to the practice of rewriting Asian ethnicities in order to bring them in line with Western values and understandings. As a new teacher, at IST I was intrigued by this practice of ‘rewriting’ Asian ethnicities. Opening up my first class roll on the school data base I looked over the names. The roll contained three columns: Last Name, First Name and Preferred Name. This was not surprising as I had taught in schools where students could opt to use a shortened version of their name. What surprised me, however, was that these names were nothing like the predominantly Asian first names. Instead they had been replaced with typically western names. Nayak and Kehily (2008) describe a similar occurrence in Western businesses which have relocated to India who encourage their workers to anglicize their first names, “as part of a process of whitening that attempts to modernize these identities while bleaching their ethnicities” (p. 24). At a first glance the process of name changing may seem insignificant. However, on further consideration it seems to highlight the dominance of Western culture in IST and is suggestive of some of the challenges students face as they move between the school, their home and the local communities as discussed previously.

Although Nayak and Kehily (2008) have not focused on youth in Taiwan, their findings provide insight into youth in today’s globalized society and help to expand upon the examples of changes in youth culture presented by Young (1991) and Liu (2002). Young (1991) and Liu’s (2002) summaries of the social, cultural, political and economic changes influencing youth culture in Taiwan present a largely negative picture of young people in Taiwan today. However, there have been some positive changes in this time period, particularly in relation to the changing status of young women. Gender roles and expectations of women in Taiwan over the past forty years have undergone significant changes as social status, community involvement, educational and occupational opportunities for

women in Taiwan have slowly improved (Chiang, 2000). Such changes directly influence the lives of the young women in this study and are thus outlined below.

### **Young women in contemporary Taiwan**

Historical and political events have had significant influence on the role of women in Taiwanese society. In 1895 Taiwan was ceded to Japan by China after the first Sino-Japanese War. During this Japanese occupation Taiwanese women were told that their bodies belonged to the emperor of Japan, that they were subordinate to men and that their role was to fulfil the needs of their husbands (Liu & Regehr, 2006). In 1949 Martial Law was implemented in Taiwan by President Chiang Kaishek after Taiwan's separation from China at the end of World War II. Women were ordered to be good mothers and wives and to support their men in times of war (Liu & Regehr, 2006). In 1987 President Chiang Gin-Kwuo ended the implementation of Martial Law which resulted in a cultural revolution where "women's rights and freedoms had entered into social consciousness and political action" (Liu & Regehr, 2006, p. 5). As the political environment has changed in Taiwan over the past century so too has the place of women in society.

Young Taiwanese women today have greater educational opportunities than their grandmothers and mothers (Chiang, 2000). In 1950 10.89% of students at the college and university levels were women. This has increased to 48.08% of undergraduate students and 28.9% of graduate students being female in 1997 (Chiang, 2000). According to Chiang (2000), this is a result of recent economic growth, reduced family size, the introduction of free education up to junior high school, and changing attitudes amongst parents and women in society. In conjunction with a rise in women's overall education level, employment opportunities for women in Taiwan since 1970 have increased. Chiang (2000) indicates, this to furthermore be an outcome of industrialization's demand for unskilled labour, increases in urban tertiary employment, technological advances which have simplified and reduced housework, and family planning which has provided women with the option of fewer children and longer working years.

In addition to increased educational and occupational opportunities for young women in Taiwan there has also been a broadening of perspectives of feminine values. Nayak and Kehily (2008) recognise that the rise of global cultures has provided new spaces, through the circulation of media images, for the production of new gender styles and identities. This occurrence is apparent in Taiwan. After the end of Martial Law, Taiwan was open to the import of foreign information, such as movies, TV shows and magazines. These exposed Taiwanese women to a wider array of feminine roles, norms, values, aesthetics, and styles of communication. Lin (2008) suggests that as Taiwanese women became increasingly aware of alternative forms of womanhood, some were inspired to pursue wisdom, confidence and increasingly 'western' ideals of feminine physical attractiveness.

The exposure to different feminine values has resulted in changes to cultural values of beauty and femininity in Taiwan over the past century. Some are viewed as revolutionary, such as the relinquishing of the custom of binding women's feet in the early 1900's. According to Yu et al., (2004), this move significantly altered Taiwanese views of feminine beauty; "Instead of being petite and needing protection, a healthy body shape was now considered as one of the beautiful elements for Taiwanese women" (p. 385). Of course, the notion of a 'healthy body shape' is not unproblematic and is often influenced and manipulated by broader cultural, social and political factors and agents. Consumerism and modern media have been proven to have significant influence on gender practices and femininity (Nayak & Kehily, 2008; Yu et al., 2004). Focusing on young women in particular, Nayak and Kehily (2008) propose that young women in contemporary culture are positioned as subjects of consumption. They suggest that rather than being regulated by traditional concepts of femininity, young women in contemporary society are influenced by a range of media messages that appear to be pro feminist but still act to define and regulate 'norms' of femininity, "The I'm a princess' spending power of girls energetically embraces desires for self-improvement, pampering and indulgence in ways that re-inscribe young women in the disciplinary power of gender subordination" (p. 68). Nayak and Kehily (2008) expand upon this idea with the introduction of the 'girl power' discourse which they suggest is present in contemporary fashion,

music, television and movies. This proposes a new version of femininity, suggesting to young women that they can get what they want and do what they want. In Taiwan traditional consumer messages of the submissive happy housewife have been replaced with messages of the modern, empowered, successful woman (Lin, 2008). On the surface these messages may seem pro-feminist. However, according to Nayak and Kehily (2008), they continue to contain underlying elements of gender regulation and control. So although contemporary women in Taiwan have more control over the use of their bodies, it must be acknowledged that they still face gendered norms and expectations that are generated at both the local and global level.

Although there have been many positive steps towards the improvement of women's place in Taiwanese society over the last forty years there have also been many challenges. Discriminatory practices continue to be an issue in the work place, particularly towards pregnant or married women. As more women join the workforce in Taiwan, challenges often arise as the, "carry the double burden of labouring both in and outside of the home" (Chiang, 2000, p.238). This is often a result of the influence of Confucian cultural norms which continue to pose challenges to the status of women (Chiang, 2000; Lin, 2008; Yu et al., 2004). Historically, women in Taiwan were inferior to and dependent on men. A belief of the 'Three obediences' restricted women to obey their father before marriage, their husband after marriage, and their eldest son in widowhood (Lin, 2008; Yu et al., 2004). Confucian principles set the ideal of female behaviour as being, "pure, docile, gentle, decorous and quiet" (Lin, 2008, p. 3). These principles continue to limit opportunities for some women in Taiwanese society today (Lin, 2008; Yu et al., 2004). Furthermore, as Chiang (2000) observes, some companies in Taiwan encourage women to leave work on marriage or childbirth to avoid paying maternity leave. Gender discrepancy is also evident in occupational positions. There is an over-representation of females in lower-paid teaching and clerical professions and an under-representation of females in higher paid professions such as engineering, medicine and political leadership (Chiang, 2000).

Many societal changes over the last forty years in Taiwan have had a significant influence on what it means to be a young woman living in Taiwan today. Long standing beliefs about gender roles of women in Taiwanese society have begun to be challenged, resulting in increased opportunities for some women. Globalization, consumerism and modern media expose young women in Taiwan to a wider array of feminine norms, values and behaviours which contribute to the gender practices and conceptions of femininity. However, the traditional expectations of women's place in society appear to remain deeply ingrained in Taiwanese culture and continue to restrict many women's lives, particularly in areas of education, employment and the family. Young women at IST have to daily negotiate these expectations as they move between the social spaces of their home, inner-city, and international school. What is not known is how these expectations influence the young women's gendered understandings of and experiences in physical activity.

### ***Gender and physical activity***

Traditional views of gender took a strictly biological perspective which saw gender differences as the natural result of the two different sexes (Hawkesworth, 1997). In opposition to such traditional understandings of gender, contemporary feminist research has come to perceive gender as a social, cultural and historical construct (Azzarito, Solomon, & Harrison, 2006; Clatterbaugh, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Garrett, 2004; Hills, 2007; McNay, 1999; O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008; Whitehead & Biddle, 2008). The origins of such an understanding of gender were developed in the 1960's and 1970s when feminist theorists utilized the concept of sex role theory to suggest that gender differences were the result of socialization. Whilst sex role theory is important because it recognizes that gender is socially constructed rather than biologically determined, this approach to gender has been criticized due its inability to satisfactorily account for change and its difficulty in grasping issues of power and inequality (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 2003; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Building upon the understanding that gender is a social construct, feminist researchers such as Connell (1987) focused on the ways in which conceptions of gender were utilized by institutions and social structures to create and maintain a



‘gender order’ which privileges men and marginalises women through hegemony and ideology. Connell’s (1987) hegemonic understanding of gender and power conceived of gender as a relational concept as opposed to the dichotomous understanding of masculinity and femininity. Although this relational understanding of gender allowed for multiple forms of masculinity and femininity to be recognized, poststructuralist feminist researchers have suggested that hegemonic understandings of gender are too rigid and the oppressive. Whilst still acknowledging that gender is a relational, social, cultural and historical construct, post-structural accounts of gender seek to shift the focus from structural constraints to possibilities of empowerment and resistance (Scruton & Flintoff, 2002). (See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of poststructural feminist understandings of gender).

Of particular relevance to this study is how broader understandings of gender impact young women’s involvement in physical activity. Young women’s motivation to be physically active, the type of activity they select and the experience they have is continually influenced by conceptions of femininity and other socio-cultural factors (Kolski, 2008). These factors consist of accepted meanings, ideas and practices that have been constructed around physical activity. The following section provides a review of literature concerning some of the factors that influence young women’s experiences of physical activity. More specifically, it examines the changing global roles of physical activity as well as the influence of immediate social and cultural factors on young people’s involvement in physical activity.

Physical activity as a social and cultural entity has taken many forms over recent decades. Originally physical activities were utilized as tools for education (Kolski, 2008); however, over time various physical activities gained their own value and became commodities in the market place and the field of leisure pursuits and health and well-being (Koski, 2008). Indeed some forms of physical activity, such as organized sport, have become a phenomenon of high importance to millions of participants and spectators worldwide and are now an integral part of commercialism in consumer societies (Dunning, 1999; Koski, 2008; Maguire, 1991). As such, physical activity has become an increasingly profitable

commodity in industries such as food, beverage, media, marketing, tourism, construction, manufacturing and gambling (Maguire, 1991; McPherson, Curtis & Loy, 1989; Moore, 2007; Silk & Andrews, 2001).

The changing value of physical activity from an educational tool to a commodified product can be perceived as a general *global* development. At a more detailed level, these changes are negotiated by individuals within their immediate *local* social and cultural context. Aspects of local social and cultural contexts involving environmental and intrapersonal factors which influence youth involvement in physical activity have been investigated by many researchers (e.g., Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Daley, 2002; Humbert et al., 2006; Sollerhed et al., 2005). Humbert et al., (2006) investigated various factors that Canadian youth from low and high socioeconomic status (SES) areas considered to be important to increasing physical activity participation among their peers. The findings showed that environmental factors such as proximity, cost, facilities and safety were important determinants of physical activity involvement for youth living in low SES areas. Similar findings were reported in a comparable study conducted by Dagkas and Stathi (2007) in the United Kingdom. Additional findings in Humbert et al.'s (2006) study highlighted the importance of intrapersonal factors such as perceived skill, competence and time, as well as social factors including friends and adult support as influential factors in physical activity participation rates of both high and low SES youth. Similar findings were presented in an investigation conducted by Sollerhed, Ejlertsson and Aпитzsch (2005) into variables related to positive attitudes to physical activity amongst adolescents in Sweden. Daley (2002) also reflected the significance of competence on self perception on participation in physical activity when exploring the relationship between physical self perception of participants and non participants in extra-curricular physical activity in England and Wales.

Studies motivated by concerns of young women's waning participation in physical activity predominantly highlight the barriers to, and negative aspects of, female participation in physical activity. Humberstone (2002) takes this approach in his examination of the influence of masculinities and femininities in physical activity. He draws attention to the negative effects of inferiorised femininities

being constructed and enforced through young women's involvement in physical activity. Although such studies provide insight into the limiting factors young women face in physical activity involvement, they fail to recognise factors which motivate young women to be physically active. In recognition of this short coming other researchers have chosen to focus on factors that could be used to encourage participation in physical activity. Such an objective was apparent in a study by Vu et al., (2006) who examined perceptions of physical activity and their influence on physical activity involvement amongst young people in the United States. In line with the work of Whitehead and Biddle (2008) in the United Kingdom, Vu et al., (2006) highlighted limiting factors to girls' physical activity involvement including, negative comments from male peers, lack of motivation, being shy, competing interests, time spent on homework, limited availability opportunities and costs; however, they also emphasised the motivating influence of the family and peers, in the form of verbal encouragement, support and active participation, as a significant influential factor in girls' decisions to be physically active.

Although contemporary research is beginning to examine both oppressive and empowering influences on young women's physical activity involvement, the majority of such studies have been conducted in Western contexts. At present there appears to be a gap in English based literature concerning attitudes towards, experiences of and involvement in physical activity of young third culture females living in Asia.

### ***Young women and physical education***

Many researchers have focused on the influence of gender upon young women's participation in PE (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Scraton, 1992; Garrett, 2006; Hills, 2006; Vertinsky, 1983). Research in the field of young women and PE began in the 1970s and 1980s and over the past three decades there have been several changes in research trends as a result of subsequent developments in knowledge and understanding in this area (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Early research investigated the historical origin of girls' PE which led to a focus on the disparity of experiences between boys and girls (e.g., Vertinsky, 1983). This was

followed by feminist studies of power relations between the genders (e.g., Azzarito & Solomon, 2006; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Rich, 2004; Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1999). Recent research places female students at the focus of the research in order to investigate their diverse experiences in PE (e.g., Garret, 2006; Hills, 2006; McNay, 2000; O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008). This section will briefly summarize findings from the first two research directions and then elaborate more fully on the third.

### **Early research on young women and PE**

Early gender research on young women and PE in the 1970's and 1980's typically adopted structuralist approaches (Messner, 1990; Vertinsky, 1983). Early studies tended to focus on the measurement and physical explanation of male and female gendered roles (Vertinsky, 1994). Such research often applied sex role theory to explore sex role stereotypes and socialization practices (Messner, 1990). Although this approach identified gender as a social construction, it failed to explore why some gender differences were perceived to be more significant than others and were consequentially allowed to impact so significantly upon the provision of PE for girls (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Flintoff and Scraton (2006) suggest attempts to address this failing were apparent in following liberal feminist research which focused on the inequality of opportunity for girls in comparison to boys in PE. Such a focus was apparent in the work of Vertinsky (1983) who often explained inequality to be a result of a lack of access to the same opportunities for boys and girls. As the field of feminist theory began to develop, research into young women and PE shifted its focus to structural power relations between the genders (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Nigles, 2006). Such studies examined practices and processes that acted to, "construct masculine and feminine identity in ways that empower men and disempower women" (Nigles, 2006, p. 80). A seminal study in this field by Scraton (1992), suggests that historically PE has been premised on a commitment to different criteria for girls and boys based on assumptions of 'femininity'. Scraton (1992) categorizes these assumptions into three areas. Firstly, perceived gendered physical abilities, based upon assumptions of physiological differences between males and females. Secondly, the underlying influence of the origins of physical education whereby physical activity was utilized to help ensure the

future well-being of the race through the preparation of females for the future role of motherhood. Thirdly, gendered physicality, based on assumptions that a 'young lady' is disciplined, behaves well and cares about her appearance. Scraton (1992) indicates that these assumptions remained dominant in the attitudes and ideas held by those involved in the policies and practices of PE at the time.

Research into structural power relations between the genders also examined the ongoing debate of mixed vs. single-sex PE. Several studies recognise some benefits of single-sex PE but also emphasise that wider and longer term consequences need to be taken into account (Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1999). Elaborating on this point, Wright (1999) suggests that single sex classes and modified game rules for inclusion of males and females, "do not address the underlying issues of power relationships and the effect of cultural expectations about being female or male" (p. 184). Essentially, such studies suggest that both mixed and single-sex PE classes have the potential to contribute to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Further research examining structural power relations between the genders has also focused on the 'problem' of young women's lack of engagement in PE (Azzarito & Solomon, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2000; Rich, 2004; Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1999). Several of these studies found that teachers' often believed young women's loss of interest in PE to be a 'natural' inevitable problem inherent in adolescent young women (Rich, 2004; Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1999). Teacher perceptions in these studies constructed young women as 'problems' as, "resisters who avoided physical education any way they could, who had less skill and enthusiasm" (Wright, 1999, p. 182). In another example of young women being perceived as 'naturally problematic', McKenzie et al., (2000) argue the *problem* of girls' lack of engagement in PE is a result of young women not valuing physical activity. This study reported that many adolescent girls preferred to socialize than exercise as they did not like to sweat. McKenzie et al., (2000) called for teaching strategies to be implemented to meet the physical skills and emotional needs of girls. Adopting Connell's (1987) conception of the gender order, Azzarito and Solomon (2006) present the concept of oppression as an explanation for girls' negative attitudes and lack of participation in PE. They state that male hegemonic forms of sport promote attitudes of male superiority and are enforced through powerful occupation of

space, skilful control over objects, and physical power. Azzarito and Solomon (2006), describe the perception of young women being “naturally weaker” and “passive” as a, “gender blind perspective” (p. 223). Rich (2004), Scraton (1992) and Azzarito and Solomon (2000) suggest such a perspective limits the reason for young women’s lack of engagement in PE to natural and biological phenomena. Although structuralist accounts of gender have enabled researchers to examine the ways in which different forms of masculinity and femininity are constructed and privileged over others and the influence that has on young women’s involvement in physical activity, such structuralist accounts tend to present power as a repressive structure which acts only to favour dominant forms of masculinity and femininity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Nilges, 2006). In contrast, poststructuralist researchers perceive power as acting in a manner which is “plural and productive” (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006, p. 770).

### **Poststructural feminist theory and contemporary research on young women and PE**

Recent research in the field of young women and PE presents a shift to a more poststructuralist perspective. It moves away from an emphasis on women’s shared oppression and inequality to investigations of the diversity of women’s experiences (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). Such research investigates individual girls’ experiences of PE whilst recognising the possibilities of empowerment *and* resistance. Some of the common topics explored in this research include the ways in which young women engage in, and sometimes resist PE, factors influencing their enjoyment of PE, gendered discourses of the body in PE, and young women’s perspectives of their needs in PE.

Recent poststructural research recognises young women as active agents who are not just acted upon by social and cultural expectations in society; although they have sometimes limited choices it is acknowledged that young women can act to either, accept, reject or recreate these choices (Azzarito et al., 2006; Hills, 2006; McNay, 2000). Although several studies have suggested that girls’ lack of participation in PE is a result of the acceptance of particular social and cultural expectations (e.g., Azzarito et al. 2006; McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000; Rich, 2004; Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1999), it has also been

observed that the perceived benefits of physical activity act to motivate many young women to engage in physical activity (Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, Schmitz, Ward, Conway, Pratt, Baggett, Lytle & Pate, 2008; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Garrett, 2004; Whitehead & Biddle, 2008). Indeed some studies have found that although girls construct diverse meanings around their participation in physical activities, many viewed themselves as valuing exercise and being actively involved in physical activities (Azzarito et al., 2006; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Similarly, recent poststructural investigations of factors influencing young women's enjoyment of PE have helped to reveal the diverse nature of their experiences including both positive and negative factors (e.g., Azzarito et al., 2006; McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000; Rich, 2004; Scraton, 1992; Wright, 1999). A factor, positively associated with PE class enjoyment that is evident in many of these studies, is young women's perceived physical competence in physical activity (Barr-Anderson et al., 2008; Garrett, 2006; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Hills, 2007; O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008; Sollerhed, Ejlertsson & Aпитzsch, 2005). A positive PE class environment as created by teachers was shown to also contribute to the young women's enjoyment of PE (Barr-Anderson et al., 2008, Hills, 2007, and Sollerhed et al., 2005). Positive experiences in PE have also been linked to opportunities to develop friendships (O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008) and having fun (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008). On the other hand, factors associated with lack of enjoyment in PE were often associated with PE class practices. Studies conducted by Van Daalen (2005) and Garrett (2006) found that for many girls, PE was presented as a source of constant shaming regarding their athletic ability and eventually themselves. Forced competition, degrading evaluation, and sexuality and size related harassment by both peers and teachers led the participants in these studies to opt out of PE classes.

### **The embodiment of gender expectations in PE**

Gendered expectations of female bodies have been shown in some research to be internalised by young women and as such, have influenced their engagement in PE. O'Donovan and Kirk's (2008) investigation into motivational factors of girls' engagement in PE found that due to concerns relating to physical appearance, co-educational PE became problematic as girls placed increased

value on how they looked when boys were present. Additional findings in Garrett's (2004) investigation of physical identity highlight the pressures some young women face in not being able to live up to the cultural ideal of a thin body. Much contemporary research on gender and PE draws upon the notion of 'embodiment'. Embodiment is based on the understanding that physical identity is constructed and embodied into the material fabric of individuals. As Garrett (2004) describes, "the body actively participates in the construction of the self" (p. 142). The body is an influential element in our experiences, identities, physicality and our decisions to engage or resist PE practices (Azzarito et al., 2006). Some recent poststructuralist research provides evidence of the multiple and sometimes contradictory ways in which young women experience their bodies and embody a physical identity (Azzarito & Solomon, 2006; Garrett, 2004; Kirk, 2002). Azzarito and Solomon (2006) investigate how high school students in the United States identified themselves with images of bodies drawn from fitness and sports magazines, and how their body narratives were linked to their participation in PE. Their findings present body narratives reflecting notions of 'comfortable', 'bad' and 'borderland' bodies which in turn influenced their level of confidence and participation in PE. In a similar study in Australia, Garrett (2004) presents multiple perceptions of 'comfortable', 'bad' and 'different' bodies. Kirk (2002) investigates the social construction of the body through schooling and education. His findings recognise that the body is in culture and nature simultaneously and educational processes in PE and sport are important contributors to the social construction of bodies. In each of these studies girls' narratives of their physicality were found to be significantly less 'comfortable' than boys. Azzarito & Solomon (2006), Garret (2004) and Kirk (2004) call for a need for critical pedagogy to destabilize dominant discourses of mass media body culture in order to help students develop positive, meaningful and empowering relationships with their bodies.

### **Improving PE experiences for young women**

In recognition that PE is not fulfilling the needs of many female students, some studies have investigated areas for improvement. Azzarito and Solomon (2006, Garret (2004) and Kirk (2004) have highlighted the need for critical pedagogy in order to destabilise dominant discourses of mass media body culture



so as to help students develop positive, meaningful and empowering relationships with their bodies. Similarly, Gibbons & Gaul (2004) have suggested that PE classes might be restructured to offer more respectful and supportive class environments, choice and variety of lifetime physical activities and personal accomplishment. In supporting such an approach, Flintoff and Scraton (2001) confirmed a significant gap between PE programmes and active leisure lifestyles of young women outside of school, highlighting a need for consideration of alternative physical activities. In a summary of several suggested approaches, Cockburn (2001) identifies four challenges for the PE profession in order to better meet young women's needs: 1) Greater consideration and further exploration of alternative ways of conceptualising, and defining, physical activity, movement, sport, and PE so as to challenge the hegemony of traditional games and sports; 2) Offer students more significant choice in PE to cater for diversity; 3) Cater more efficiently for the broad range of predispositions found in PE classes; 4) To contest the official discourse of PE which celebrates individualism, power, and control but often remains silent on issues of class, race, gender and ability.

Research in the realm of young women and PE predominantly presents gender as a social construct. Early structuralist studies of power provide insight into influential notions of hegemonic masculinities and femininities. Recent poststructural feminist research presents the diverse nature of experience in PE. Relevant complexities of gender and PE have been summarized in this section; however, the examination of the relationship between culture and experiences of physical activity and physical education, pertinent to the students in this study, has been largely absent from the literature. Notable exceptions are discussed below.

### ***Young women, culture and physical activity***

Since the 1980s and 1990s a growing body of research has examined the influence of gender and culture on the physical activity experiences of young women. Whilst most of this research, has focused on western contexts such as

America, Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and Canada, less research has been focused on the experiences of women from non-western cultures.

### **Research on young women, culture and physical activity in western contexts**

Studies investigating young women, culture and physical activity in Western contexts often focus on Muslim women. Although these studies are based on Muslim women they offer insight into issues such as, religious and family influences on physical activity, the resulting internalization of power strategies and negotiations of non-Western and Western cultures which are relevant to my research.

Religion is a common focus of studies in the field of young women, culture and physical activity, and is suggested to both oppress and encourage participation in physical activity (Kay, 2006; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). Walseth and Fasting (2003) examine Egyptian women's views on the relationship between Islam and physical activity. Although the young women in the study agreed that Islam encourages participation for women, different interpretations of Islam influenced the extent of participation (e.g., the use of the veil, gender segregation, the concept of appropriate displays of excitement and the power relationship between men and women). Such barriers influenced the kind of physical activity women could participate in and reflect forms of internalized power strategies. A study of young Muslim women's physical activity involvement in Britain (Kay, 2006) found similar power strategies apparent within the family. Kay (2006) reveals the extensive parental influence on the young women's involvement in physical activity. This influence was mixed, family members were described as supportive, but this was often conditional on the physical activity conforming to acceptable behaviour for young women in line with religious observance and social respectability.

Negotiation of Western and non-Western cultures in the form of hybridity was another key focus of studies in the field of young women, culture and physical activity (Kay, 2006; Strandbu, 2005). Kay (2006) notes young Muslim women living in Britain drew not only on their own culture but also that of the

majority culture and cultures of other minorities in the population. This was evident in the young women's dialogue when confronted with differences amongst themselves about what was appropriate behaviour for young Muslim women (e.g., approval of physical activity participation). Similar findings were apparent in the work of Strandbu (2005) examining the stories of Muslim girls in Oslo with immigrant backgrounds. In this study, young women's negotiation of various cultures presented elements of hybridity. This was evident in the young women's combination of different lifestyles (e.g., approval of participation in physical activity, aspiration of higher education, respect for parents and the family, interest in fashion, music, and films from America, Europe and their parents' country of origin). In contrast, this study also presents examples of some young women's lack of motivation to engage in, embody or consider practices of other cultures. Strandbu (2005) suggests that such cases are possibly a result of parental and peer influence which limit observation of or engagement in 'foreign' cultural practices.

A notable study in the field of young women, culture and physical activity which focuses on Asian women is Hanson's (2005) examination of young Asian American women's participation in physical activity during high school. Key findings in this study suggest that Asian American women overall are just as likely to participate in physical activity as other groups of women. Hanson (2005) argues that Asian American families and communities are, "not the traditional enclaves of female passivity that they have been portrayed as" (p. 304). Hanson (2005) suggests that this attitude towards non-traditional activity may be a result of the large presence and success of their mothers in the labour force.

### **Research on young women, culture and physical activity in Eastern contexts**

Research in the field of young women culture and physical activity in Eastern contexts is limited. Vertinsky, McManus, Sit and Liu (2005) have investigated the gendered and cultured contours of the history of PE development in Hong Kong. This study has relevance to my research as it examines similar complexities of gender and culture. It presents the constraining effects of Chinese attitudes toward gender roles and the active, sporting body on the involvement of

women in physical activity. It also highlights how the competitive sports focus in Western PE and sport can be less effective in a postcolonial society.

An investigation by Yu et al., (2004) of traditional and recent cultural and social factors impacting women's participation in physical activities in Taiwan is particularly relevant to this study. This is one of the few studies to explore young women's physical activity experiences in Taiwan. Factors such as changes in the family structure, equal educational opportunities, and a growing attention from the government toward physical activity for all were shown to have encouraged physical activity participation for women in Taiwan.

It is apparent from the review of literature that there are many gaps in the English language based literature concerning physical activity experiences of non-western women particularly within non-western countries or contexts. Of particular relevance to this study is the dearth of research concerning the influence of cultural values regarding gender and physical activity and the impact that this has on the PE experiences of young women in a mixed cultural context such as IST.

### ***Summary***

Although progress has been made in the field of gender issues in physical activity, there are still many areas deserving further development and investigation:

- Numerous studies examine the complexities of the international school setting, however, little is known about the influence such complexities have on young women's experiences in physical activity.
- Although there is a growing body of literature on TCK experiences of cultural dissonance there is no apparent literature which specifically examines TCKs experiences in physical activity.
- Whilst several studies suggest traditional expectations of a women's place in Taiwanese society continue to be deeply embedded in Taiwanese culture, little is known about the influence of these expectations on young women's understandings of and experiences in physical activity.

- Extensive research has examined the influence of recent cultural, social, economic and political changes on young women's understandings of their bodies in relation to, physical activity, sport and PE, however, much of this research has focused on the western context. In contrast, very little research has focused on the experiences of women in non-western cultures.

Thus, having identified notable gaps in the existing literature that examined the influence of social, cultural, political and economic changes on young women's experiences of physical activity, in non-western contexts, this research aimed to contribute to the existing body of research by providing new insights into the physical activity experiences of female students in an international school in Taiwan. Based on my own observations of living in Taiwan, I developed a tacit understanding of some of the complex contextual factors that influence the lived experiences of female students, however, it is difficult to know how, and to what extent, the many social, historical, cultural, political and economic factors influence young women's understandings of their bodies, health and fitness, which can come to the fore in the PE setting. Thus, in this study I was motivated to gain a better understanding of young women's lived experiences of physical activity in an international school in Taiwan. Arguably, this research adds to the existing field of research by revealing some of the complexities of culture, gender, and physicality in physical activity via a case study of four young women at an international school in Taiwan. Based on my research I also seek to offer some suggestions for teachers working with TCK and particularly young women who are from different cultural backgrounds than the teachers. This increased understanding and awareness will enhance my own teaching practice and can provide useful insight to other teachers working in international schools or working with TCK. The following research questions guided my investigation:

1. How do socio-cultural contextual factors influence how young women living in Taiwan and attending an international school understand and experience physical activity?
2. How do these factors shape female student's experiences of PE?

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

When starting this research it was my desire to examine two key areas of interest; firstly, the unique and complex social setting in which my students live, and secondly, the influence that this has on the experiences of young women in physical activity. In order to do this I utilized a combination of theoretical and methodological tools with the aim of generating the, “best means for acquiring knowledge about the world” in this particular social setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). This chapter introduces these tools and clarifies the reasoning behind their selection. In so doing, the following chapter consists of six parts. First, I outline my theoretical approach. Here I explain my rationale for employing a poststructural feminist perspective and the use of a Bourdieudian approach for understanding the everyday experiences of young women in physical activity in an international school in Taiwan. The second section, presents a summary of ethical considerations whilst the research participants are introduced in the third section. This is followed by an outline of the methods used to gain insight into the participants’ embodied experiences of gender, culture and physicality. Throughout this fourth section, I also discuss the use of focus groups and in-depth interviews. The fifth section explains my narrative approach to data analysis and presentation of research findings. Lastly, I address issues of validity in this study.

### ***Theoretical framework***

One of the goals of this research was to reveal some of the complexities of culture and gender as experienced by young women living in Taiwan attending an international school. Poststructural feminist insights in relation to the subjective nature of experience, and in particular, the significance of language, gender and culture offered a useful framework with which to explore the young women’s complex social setting and resulting multiple, dynamic and nuanced experiences of physical activity.

### **Poststructural feminist theory**

Poststructural feminist theory (PSFT) is an example of what Birrell (2000) describes as a ‘synthetic theory’ (p. 66); it combines insights from both

poststructuralist thinking and feminism. Birrell (2000) suggests that the emergence of PSFT stemmed from criticisms of feminist theory's focus on gender as the primary mechanism of oppression in society, often ignoring other influential relations of power such as class and race (Birrell, 2000). As a result, researchers in the 1980s and 1990s began combining feminist theory with various strands of poststructuralism (e.g., Foucault, Deleuze). In particular, PSFT draws upon the poststructural stance that experience is subjective. As such, it is recognized that, multiple truths and realities exist in the form of discourses people use to make sense of their lives. The concept of discourses and their relationship to language is described by Burr (1995) who explains that, "we can only represent our experiences to ourselves and to others by using the concepts embedded in our language, so that our thoughts, our feelings and how we represent our behaviour are all 'pre-packaged' by language" (Burr, 1995, p. 39). Consequently within poststructuralism and PSFT, language is viewed as the instrument for defining and contesting social organization and power, and as the place where one's self/subjectivity is constructed (Birrell, 2000; Denzin, 2004; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005).

Whilst accommodating poststructuralist notions of subjectivity and language, PSFT also adopts a poststructuralist understanding of power that recognises the ability of power to act in a productive and pluralistic manner as opposed to an oppressive convergent manner. Some researchers suggest that this combined understanding of subjectivity, language and power gives poststructuralist theories such as PSFT the means by which dominant gender discourses as well as social and cultural practices can be destabilized or subverted (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1994; Weedon, 1987). To this end, PSFT researchers strive to not only investigate human experiences but to also generate social action in response to insights gained from their research (Birrell, 2000; Patton, 2002; Scraton, 1992). Borrowing from the traditions of feminist research, PSFT researchers aim to implement such social change through the use of praxis. Such research is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as, "practical, reflexive, pragmatic action – directed to solving problems in the world" (p. 34). The use of praxis in order to implement change acknowledges that women are active participants who make choices and participate in structuring their own identities

and experiences and as such are capable of generating change. PSFT's potential for change is emphasized by Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie (1994) who consider that PSFT is a theory which not only, "acknowledges discourses and practices of struggle and resistance" but also "recognises the dynamic interplay of social forces, and which therefore can be readily deployed as a theory *of and for change*" (pp. 188-189).

### **My use of poststructural feminist theory**

As a PE teacher working with young third culture females I was drawn to the use of a poststructuralist feminist theory for a number of reasons. Given the unique social and cultural setting within which the students in this study live, the use of a poststructural theory presented the best means by which to reveal and acknowledge a range of factors that might influence the participants' experiences of physical activity. This included but was not limited to a focus on influences of gender. Such an incorporated investigation of the relationship between the participants' experiences of physical activity and the broader social structures and cultural settings in which they exist, allows PSFT research such as this to acknowledge and more richly represent the diverse nature of the participants' lived experiences, whilst also examining the complexity of the social spaces and the effect these social spaces had on the participants' experiences (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Wright 1995). As my research utilized interviews as well as narratives to examine the stories of four young women's experiences of physical activity and PE, a poststructuralist approach which recognises that females are *active participants* in making sense of their experiences seemed appropriate. By adopting such an understanding it was my intention to create through this research a space in which both oppressive and empowering influences on young women's experiences in physical activity and PE could be revealed. Whilst many elements of poststructuralist theory are relevant to this study, elements of feminist theory within PSFT are also pertinent. In particular, the desire to create a positive change through praxis as it is my hope that insights gained from this research can be used to improve the quality of my own teaching and the teaching of others who work with third culture students.



Although, as Guba and Lincoln (2005) suggest, there is no one way to do poststructural research such as PSFT, PSFT scholars have drawn upon an array of theoretical perspectives to explore the nature of human experience. This includes the work of Michael Foucault (e.g. Azzarito, Solomon & Harrison, 2006; Wright, 1995). However, there is growing interest in the use of Bourdieu's work in this field (Adkin, 2004; Brooks & Wee, 2008; Hills, 2006; McNay, 1999; Thorpe, 2009). I drew upon a Bourdieudian approach to inform my data analysis in this research. Relevant theoretical concepts are outlined below.

### ***Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, field and capital***

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu initially developed theoretical concepts of habitus, capital, and field in the 1960s as a challenge to structuralism. These concepts were driven by questions of field research "centred on social transformation, cultural disjuncture, and the fissuring of consciousness" (Wacquant, 2004, p. 387). Bourdieu describes habitus, capital and field as "open concepts" which,

have no definition other than systemic ones, and are designed to be *put to work empirically in systemic fashion*. Hence, such notions of habitus, field and capital can be defined but only in the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 95)

In contrast to structural theories of set systems in social settings, the vagueness of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts allows recognition of the subjective nature of social settings. Understanding surfaces when his concepts are applied to specific social settings. As such, they proved a useful tool in making sense of the social setting and its consequential influences in this research.

### **Habitus**

Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus as a way in which to conceptualize human action or practice, accounting for its regularity, coherence and order while also recognizing its strategic nature (Crossley, 2001). Bourdieu (1984) describes habitus to involve "primary forms of classification" which "function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of

introspective scrutiny or control by the will” (p. 466). He emphasizes habitus is not a principle of determination but rather a generative structure as it is a result of past experience functioning in the present, shaping social practices of perception, thought and action (Bourdieu, 1998; Crossely, 2001; McNay, 1999). Bourdieu (1998) uses the analogy of sport to further explain the way in which habitus facilitates and shapes action,

The habitus is this kind of practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation – what is called in sport a “feel” for the game, that is, the art of anticipating the future of the game, which is inscribed in the present state of play (p. 25)

In the context of this research I drew upon the concept of habitus to investigate the elements which shaped the young women’s perceptions of, and thought and action in physical activity.

## **Field**

Social settings are made up of interrelated social spaces which Bourdieu labels as fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1992) likens fields to games in which ‘players’ pursue specific goals and ends,

In a field, agents and institutions constantly struggle, according to the regularities and the rules constitutive of this space of play (and, in given conjectures, over those rules themselves), with various degrees of strength and therefore diverse probabilities of success, to appropriate the specific products at stake in the game (p. 102)

Habitus and fields are interrelated. Crossely (2001) explains, “Involvement in a field shapes the habitus which, in turn, shapes the perceptions and actions which reproduce the field” (p. 101). This notion of social fields provided a useful analytical tool with which to examine the complex social spaces (i.e. inner-city Taiwan, the family) which surround international schools such as IST, and the TCKs that attend such schools.

## **Capital**

Bourdieu’s notion of capital incorporates the resources in the social body which have, as Crossely (2001) describes, “an exchange value” in one or more social fields (p. 96). Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital can exist in various cultural forms; including an embodied state, “in the form of long lasting

dispositions of the mind and body”, an objectified state, “in the form of cultural goods”, and an institutionalized state, “in the form of objectification” such as academic qualifications (para. 5). He also recognises capital to exist in a social form as the, “aggregate of the actual or potential resources” which are linked to “membership in a group” and an economic form which, “different types of capital can be derived from” (para. 19). As the female participants in this study discussed their physical activity experiences, various forms of capital were given value across social fields (e.g., academic, physical, and health) which then influenced their physical activity experiences. Capital and field are interdependent (Connolly, 1998; Crossley, 2001). As Crossley (2001) explains, “Fields may consist of specific distributions of capital and/or power, but those forms of capital and power are themselves relative to and dependent upon the game, as surely as checkmate is to chess” (p. 101). For example, young women living in Taiwan may have access (albeit limited) to physical capital in a particular sport or physical activity field (e.g., breakdancing club), however this form of capital is not valued in the same way in other fields (e.g., family, education, workforce).

Of particular relevance for this research was Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of embodied cultural capital, “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person” (para. 9). McNay (1999) describes embodiment as the dynamic nature of the body when perceived as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological,

The body is the threshold through which the subject’s lived experience of the world is incorporated and realized and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject. It is neither pure object since it is the place of one’s engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residue that resists incorporation into dominant symbolic schema (p. 98)

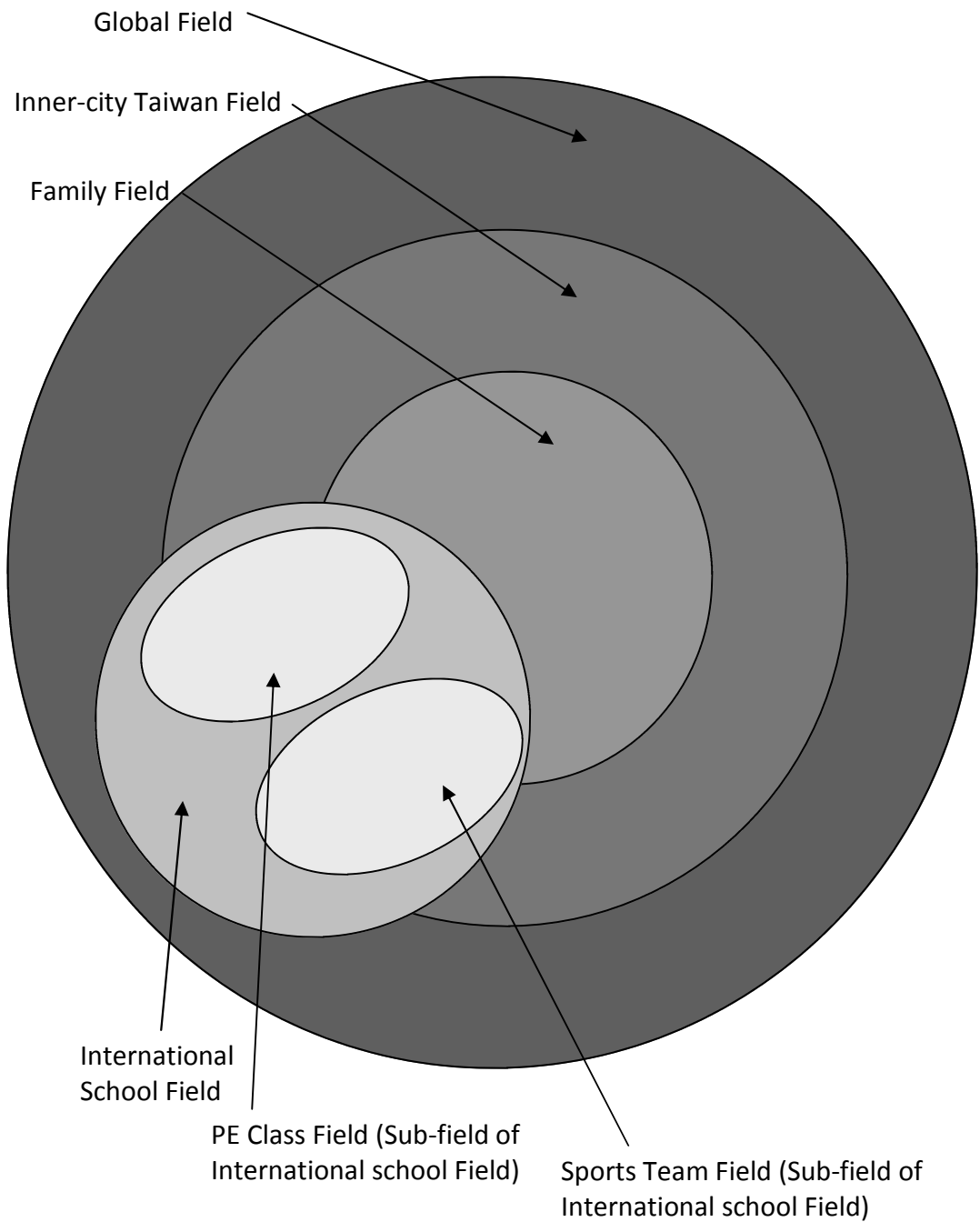
Bourdieu’s (1978) concept of embodied cultural capital incorporates elements such as the shape, size, use and adornment of the body as they reflect social and cultural meanings and has also referred to it as physical capital. This concept has been further developed by Shilling (1993). He expands upon the cultural dimensions of embodied cultural capital to include other aspects of the body which may hold specific value in social fields, functioning also as capital.

Shilling (1993) recognises aspects of ‘the body’ such as aesthetic qualities, fitness, strength and toughness to have particular value in certain fields. Depending on the social field, these different forms of embodied capital can provide varying degrees of power to individuals who possess valued elements of embodied capital. For example, in the field of a PE class, a boy that was able to display the desired embodied capital of muscularity and physical prowess would achieve a powerful position in this particular social space; his female classmates, however, would not have equal access to this embodied capital.

Bourdieu (1984) sums up the interrelated nature of his conceptual tools of habitus, field and capital in the form of an equation, “(*habitus*) (*capital*) + *field* = *practice*” (p. 101). This mathematical form seems a little sterile compared to his prior emphatic explanation of these concepts, but Crossely (2001) provides a helpful clarification: “practice is the result of various habitual schemas and dispositions (*habitus*), combined with resources (*capital*), being activated by certain structured social conditions (*field*) which they, in turn, belong to and variously reproduce and modify” (p. 96). My understanding of Bourdieu’s interconnected conceptual tools as they relate to the social setting of this research is modelled in the diagram below (adapted from Bourdieu, 1992, p.124; Pilario, 2005, pp. 128-129). Global, inner-city Taiwan, family, international school, PE class and sports fields lie in and/or intersect with other fields. The fields are interconnected and, as such, recognise that elements of habitus and capital can be carried over into other fields.

**Figure - 1**

**The social setting of young women living in Taiwan and attending an international school**



### ***Ethical considerations***

With ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Committee I firstly sought permission from the Principal of the High School and my Head of Department to carry out this research at IST.

Grade 10 female students were contacted via their school email address and provided with a brief outline of the study. My position as a past teacher of the possible participants could have presented a conflict of interest as students might have felt obliged to participate. As a result I focused on a grade level I did not teach and emphasised the voluntary nature of participation. Those interested were asked to send a brief reply via email. Following this, those interested received a formal introductory letter, information sheet and consent form. A fifteen minute information session was then held for all participants where details of the research were outlined and an opportunity to ask questions was given. This ensured that participants were well informed of their role in the research process and their rights as outlined in the initial information letter. During this meeting I emphasised again that students were not obliged to participate in the study and if they did decide to participate they had the right to withdraw from the research. I received replies from four interested participants and as a result decided to conduct one focus group with the four students and follow this with individual in-depth interviews.

Consent from Parents/Guardians of interested participants was required prior to any data collection as these participants were minors. Through an initial email and follow up conversations with each of these parties I emphasised the point that students were not obliged to participate and that they could withdraw at any time up until two days after the focus group or interview had been conducted. All consent forms were signed and collected before the small focus group began.

Focus group and in-depth interview times and locations were organised with the students' convenience in mind. They were carried out in a neutral and private room during the students' free period. I reminded all participants at the opening of the focus group/interview that they did not have to answer any

questions they did not want to. I also emphasised the importance of keeping information shared in focus groups and interviews confidential. The focus group and interviews were tape recorded. Participants received a transcript of this recording to read and/or amend before any data analysis took place. Pseudonyms have been used in all written materials for both the participants and the international school in focus (IST) in order to avoid identification.

### ***Participants***

The four young women participants involved in this research, Jessica, Mya, Karen, and Renee, were Grade 10 (15-16 year old) students at IST. The young women had attended IST for 2-8 years. They presented a range of cultural backgrounds and levels of physical activity involvement. As mentioned previously, it is difficult to differentiate specific cultural groups within the student body; however, the introductions below provide some insight into the multicultural nature of their lives.

#### **Jessica**

Jessica has attended IST for the past eight years. She attended a local school in Taipei prior to this. She was born in New York and lived there for four years before moving back to Taiwan for kindergarten. Both her parents are Taiwanese. She views herself as an American, “because I was born there and also we are going to an American school so we are more like American than Taiwanese”. She can speak English and Chinese, but speaks mainly Chinese at home. Her physical activity involvement included school cross country, touch rugby and track and field at Varsity level (the highest ranked school sports team) as well as school PE.

#### **Karen**

Karen has attended IST for the past five years. She was born in California and attended a public school there before moving to Taiwan. Both her parents are Taiwanese. Karen views herself as an American, “I think it’s because I’m definitely going back there one day, I was born there, I lived there for ten years and I really like the place so I see myself as a US citizen”. Before her brother left

for college she would speak some English at home but since he has left she speaks a lot more Chinese. Her physical activity involvement includes school PE and school basketball.

### **Mya**

Mya has attended IST for the past two years. She attended a European school in Taiwan prior to IST. Her mother is from Taiwan and her father is from Israel. Mya views herself as Taiwanese “well my passport says Israel but since I grew up here. I would say Taiwan.” She can speak English and Taiwanese but speaks English at home. Her physical activity involvement includes biking to school, the occasional tramp in the mountains and school PE.

### **Renee**

Renee has attended IST for the past seven years. She attended a local school in Korea prior to IST. Both her parents are from Korea. Renee views herself as Korean. She can speak English, Chinese and Korean, “in our house everyone likes to speak mixed languages so we sometimes call it Konglish, Korean and English and we sometimes speak Chinese too, so we mix it up”. Her physical activity involvement includes Taekwondo and school PE.

### ***Data collection***

Although I did not have as many participants involved as I would have liked, the nature of this research meant that high participant numbers were not necessary. I was not interested in making generalisations from numerous accounts of experience but rather in capturing some of the complexities and contradictions in the unique stories of a few young women. Adopting a poststructural feminist perspective, this study aimed to, “capture and communicate” some of the complexities of young women’s gendered and cultural experiences of physical activity and present their experiences in their “own words” (Patton, 2002, p. 47). Kvale (1996) notes, “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” (p. 1). To help capture some of the stories of young women living, studying and participating in physical activity in Taiwan in the early twenty-first century, I



employed two methods: focus groups and in-depth interviews. Morgan (2004) highlights the advantage of using these two methods in combination. He explains that focus groups can be used initially to identify a range of experiences and perspectives which can then be followed by in-depth interviews which can draw from the focus group insights and add more depth where needed. The combination of these two methods enabled me to not only explore the experiences of the students in more depth but to also privilege young women's personal narratives and language. These methods are expanded upon below.

### **Focus groups**

Morgan (2004) defines focus groups as, "a research technique that collects data through group interaction" (p. 263). A major strength of focus groups is their ability to explore what people have to say and in addition, to provide insight into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations (Morgan, 2004; Patton, 2002). Morgan (2004) further explains that focus groups involve participant interaction; the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other. Recognising that that individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum, Markula et al., (2001) state, "individuals actively produce multiple meanings, but their thoughts and meanings are, through language, products of society and culture" (p. 256). Therefore an additional strength of focus groups is that they involve the social orientation of the discussion which attempts to create more of a 'real-life' atmosphere in contrast to the artificiality of a one-on-one interview (Kvale, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Potential weaknesses of focus groups have been linked to the impact of the researcher and group members on the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Morgan, 2004). Morgan (2004) draws attention to a study conducted in 1995 by Agar and MacDonald which showed that researchers attempting to guide group discussion occasionally serve to disrupt the interaction which was the original point of the use of the focus group. To address this concern, the focus group in this research was semi-structured. As the moderator, I used guiding questions to generate discussion (see Appendix 7). These questions were used to give a general direction to the discussion but were not aimed at controlling the

discussion. Morgan (2004) also suggests as group interaction requires mutual self-disclosure, and thus, some topics may be ignored or avoided in a group setting. Whilst I attempted to influence as little as possible the group dynamics by allowing participants to talk as much or as little as they liked, I did not consider the participant's avoidance of particular topics (e.g., avoiding discussion of what they did not enjoy about PE at school) as a necessarily negative aspect. As Chase (2005) suggests, when someone tells a story they shape, construct and perform the self, experience and reality. Therefore the 'silences' in focus groups can be just as insightful as an eagerness to discuss a particular topic,

When researchers treat narration as actively creative and the narrator's voice as particular, they move away from questions about the factual nature of the narrator's statements. Instead, they highlight the versions of self, reality and experience that the storyteller produces through the telling (p. 657)

The ideas, perspectives and experiences discussed and avoided by the participants in the focus group were then used to help guide the direction of the following in-depth interviews.

### **In-depth interviews**

The in-depth interview can be viewed as an entranceway to narrative understandings. Miller and Crabtree (2004) describe it as a "situated, encapsulated discourse balancing intimacy and distance, which opens the way to understanding how particular individuals arrive at the cognitions, emotions, and values that emerge from the conversational journey" (p. 200). The interpretive nature of the research process in this study was ongoing and informed each interview. Throughout the interview process I kept in mind the following comments from Miller and Crabtree (2004):

The understanding of "truth" emerges in the research process and not in a significant level at the end. Qualitative "truth" gives voice to the hidden, to the silent, to the noisy, to the unspoken obvious, to the hurt, to the joy (p. 200)

In so doing, the in-depth interviews provided me with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of four young women living in Taiwan and attending an international school.

The process of in-depth interviews generally involves the use of open, direct questions to draw out stories and case-oriented narratives (Miller & Crabtree, 2004). Marshall and Rossman (1995) highlight a key directive of the use of in-depth interviews to be that the participant's perspective on the area of inquiry should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it. This was addressed at both the interview planning stage and during the interviews. I designed interview questions before, and prompts during, the interviews which were detailed enough to be understood, but basic enough to allow the participant to take any angle they chose to describe their experience (see Appendix 9). The initial questions were biographical in nature and asked for short, direct answers (e.g., How long have you been at IST for? Where were you born? How long have you lived in Taiwan?). Miller and Crabtree (2004) recommend the use of such questions as they help to establish an interview style, build rapport, jog the participant's memory, develop intimacy and provide the participant with confidence in speaking to the researcher. The main questions then aimed to draw out understandings, perceptions, and feelings associated with the participant's experiences in physical activity. These questions were based on categories discovered during the literature review and revealed in the focus group analysis. The categories included: family influences, friends and personal involvement in physical activity, the value of physical activity, the value of PE, perceptions of male and female experiences in PE, personal positive and negative experiences in PE and gendered and cultural bodies in PE. Developing the guiding interview questions and prompts was a challenging task as I was struck with the paradox of developing strategies which would invite the participant to tell particular stories, while also keeping in mind the poststructural notion that the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for (Chase, 2005). As a result, my guiding questions were general and it was not until during each in-depth interview that I would make decisions about significant areas to focus on and pursue further with the use of some of my prepared prompting questions.

When using in-depth interviews with a narrative focus the relationship of interviewer-interviewee is altered to a relationship of narrator and listener (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2008). This influenced the interview questions and subsequent

interaction between myself and my participants. A shift needed to be made away from our previous roles of teacher or authority figure and student. Moving to a relationship of narrator and listener was a challenging task in this study. The influence of Asian cultural values of authority, age and experience were apparent when talking to the young women. In particular, the young women were not very vocal when asked to critically discuss situations controlled by decisions, or actions of teachers (e.g. what they did not enjoy about PE at school). Chase (2005) and Riessman (2008) suggest this change in relationship perception can also be particularly challenging for the interviewee who often assumes that researchers are interested in the generalities rather than the personal and specific nature of their experiences. This challenge occurred early on in each of the in-depth interviews. The participants would answer my questions with short, direct responses assuming that was what I wanted. I had to initially tease out participant stories with the use of prompting questions. Miller and Crabtree (2004) recommend the use of prompts such as silence, an attentive lean, and affirmative noise, used in conjunction with questions of, “what else?”, “why?”, and “how?” I used such prompts to keep the story flowing.

As reflected above, a significant challenge in this research was to successfully invite interviewees to become narrators. In order to do this, Chase (2005) recommends discovering what is “storyworthy” in the narrator’s social setting. The focus group discussions were helpful in providing some guidance to what would possibly make each young woman’s story “storyworthy”. For example, one of the interview participants was very interested in Taekwondo and referred to this a lot when she talked about her physical activity experiences in the focus group. As a result I developed guiding questions relating to her participation in this activity for her in-depth interview with the goal of inviting her to share her story (see ‘Individual Questions’ Appendix 9).

Another attempt at discovering what was storyworthy involved the use of a selection of images of various gendered and cultural young bodies to help generate responses when I was focusing on the area of gendered bodies in PE (see Appendix Ten). A similar method was used successfully by Azzarito and Solomon (2006) in their investigation of bodies in PE. They presented a portfolio

of images of a variety of individuals of different genders, races, and body shapes and sizes drawn from sport, fitness and fashion magazines. Students were asked to comment on which images they identified with, and how PE might help them become like the body images with which they identified. My approach was similar in that it was aimed at discovering which bodies the young women identified with. However, my approach differed from that adopted in Azzarito and Solomon's (2008) research, in that rather than investigating the perceived contribution of PE to the body, I was more interested in gaining an understanding of the young women's interpretations of various bodies and the culturally specific feminine and masculine ideals to which they ascribe. As triggers to evoke such attitudes, opinions and interpretations I used images of Western and Asian, male and female youth, which displayed models and everyday people with muscular and thin bodies. I used images of young people with the aim of providing the participants with images which would generate stories as they could relate to them and in turn motivate responses. Interestingly, these images were initially not as helpful as I had hoped. During the first two interviews I used stereotypical images of extremely muscley and skinny people, showing each image one at a time and asking for their responses. The young women were not particularly receptive to this method; they tended to be embarrassed and discussed personality characteristics rather than the physical characteristics. For the final two in-depth interviews I chose images with less exaggerated physical characteristics and presented all the images as a montage (see Appendix Ten). This proved to be more successful, as it prompted discussions with the young women which provided more fruitful insight into their perceptions of the physically active, gendered and cultural body.

### ***Data analysis and reporting***

In conjunction with the focus groups, the in-depth interviews in this research were aimed at drawing out much more about the young women's complex lives. Such stories can be viewed as narratives and analyzed using narrative inquiry as they provide insight into what is intelligible in a specific context (Chase, 2005). Patton (2002) presents two foundational questions of narrative inquiry which draw out these insights and were of use in the analysis

phase of this research. They are, “What does the narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came?” and “How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?” (p. 115). The narratives generated from the data gathering processes in this research and accompanying analysis present some insight into some of the many nuances and complexities of the everyday experiences of the young women and their experiences in physical activity. The analytic procedures used in this research to answer Patton’s (2002) foundational questions of narrative inquiry are discussed below.

There are several different approaches to uncover the *how* and *what* of storytelling (Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008; Sparkes, 2002). With the goal of revealing the diverse experiences of physical activity, I drew upon a sociological approach. Chase (2005) describes the major goal of this sociological approach as showing that people create a diverse range of narrative strategies in relation to their environments and in addition, presents narratives as a way in which insight can be gained into the contradictory and shifting nature of the participants’ movement through the often contrasting social spaces. I was interested in the young women’s perceptions of, and engagement in physical activity, and also how their stories were embedded in the interaction between researcher and narrator. I wanted to understand how they made sense of their personal experiences in relation to particular social spaces (e.g., home, community, school, sports team) and how they drew upon, resisted, and/or transformed their identity as they narrated their selves, experiences, and realities in physical activity. In order to accomplish this, detailed transcripts outlining the interactional processes in the interview, in addition to thematic patterns throughout the narrative, were composed during and after each in-depth interview.

### **Chase’s analytic lenses**

While there are a variety of approaches to narrative inquiry, I found Chase’s (2005) five analytical lenses particularly useful in this study they reflected the subjective nature of experience in line with the PSFT underpinnings of this research. The first lens involves treating narrative as a form of discourse, through the process of retrospective meaning making or “the shaping or ordering

of past experience” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). This distinct discourse used by narrative researchers does not only include what happened but also the associated emotions, thoughts and interpretations, in an attempt to highlight the uniqueness of each human action and event. During my analysis of participant’s stories I attempted to look further than the actual events to how the participant made meaning of the experiences. For example, upon reading the interview transcripts I attempted to consider some of the broader cultural and social factors that may have contributed to the young women’s experiences and interpretations of particular events.

The second lens involves viewing narratives as verbal action. This perception enables the researcher to emphasize the narrator’s voice. Chase (2005) indicates that the concept of voice encapsulates what and how the narrator communicates as well as the subject positions or social locations, from which the narrator speaks. According to Chase (2005):

When researchers treat narration as actively creative and the narrator’s voice as particular, they move away from questions about the factual nature of the narrator’s statements. Instead, they highlight the versions of self, reality, and experience that the storyteller produces through the telling (p. 657)

During my analysis of the participant’s stories I attempted to explore the varying verbal actions each participant moved through. Students made use of many actions, including complaining, questioning, confirming, defending, informing and explaining.

Chase’s (2005) third view involves an understanding that stories are both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, Bourdieu’s conceptual tools proved useful in examining both the enabling *and* constraining factors in young women’s physical activity experiences. The influence of people, including family members, teachers, and peers were recognised in this study as potentially enabling *and* constraining young women’s physical experiences in various social and cultural spaces (e.g., school, city, home).

The fourth lens involves treating narratives as socially situated, interactive performances. The assumption that the self is a product of language and social interaction presents an anti-essentialist or anti-humanist stance. Burr (1995) portrays this stance as being based on an understanding that explanations of the social world are not found inside individuals but rather through the linguistic space in which they move with other people. This poststructural position also recognises that multiple and constantly changing meanings inherent in language result in temporary identities which are constantly changing depending on who one is speaking to and with what purpose (Burr, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Markula et al, 2001; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). As a result of this ever changing conception of identity, poststructuralists focus on partial, situated and relative understandings of knowledge due to the belief that different contexts are capable of producing different subjects, subjectivities, social relations and social realities (Taylor, 2001). This lens enabled examination of the many different, and constantly changing, cultural and gender norms present in the different contexts of the family, school and local community.

Chase's (2005) final narrative view involves recognition that as a researcher I am also a narrator in this process of analysis through my development of interpretations and my search for ways in which to present my ideas about the narratives studied. Chase explains that researchers put themselves into the role of narrators as they,

develop meaning out of, and some sense of order in, the material they studied; they develop their own voice(s) as they construct other's voices and realities; they narrate "results" in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures, and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences (2005, p. 657)

I had to be continually reflexive about my subjective position within the study and the affect this had upon each part of the research process. This reflexivity is discussed in more detail in the validity section of this chapter.



## **Narrative inquiry**

Throughout this research I have recognised the understanding that individuals construct their realities through narrating their stories (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) reflecting the PSFT notion that individuals make sense of reality through language (Birrell, 2000; Denzin, 2004; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). As such, I was drawn to the stories the young women told as they described their understanding of and experiences in physical activity. A pressing question, however, was how could I present these stories so that the complexities of these young women's lives could be revealed and their voices are heard, yet their identities remain confidential? Moreover, how could I present my interpretation and analysis of their stories without losing their voices, or rather talking over top of their stories?

During the focus group and in-depth interviews significant themes arose, including: perceptions of young women and physical activity, motivations to be active, bodies in PE, the influence of boys on PE participation, the place of competition in PE and the influence of the drive for academic excellence in this social setting. With the goal of capturing some of the complexities of these young women's gender and cultural experiences in physical activity and PE, I crafted seven narratives. The narratives presented in this research can be described as creative non-fiction in nature (Caulley, 2008; Riessman, 2008; Sparkes, 2002). Sparkes (2002) describes creative non-fiction as involving, "events that actually happened but that the factual evidence is being shaped and dramatized using fiction techniques to provide a forceful, coherent rendering of events that appeals to aesthetic criteria (among others) rather than simply being reported" (p. 156). The narratives in this research were based upon the four participants' experiences communicated during focus groups and interviews which I then drew upon selectively to craft into stories to highlight the major themes emerging from my data.

Writing these narratives, I was conscious that it was impossible (and undesirable) to present narratives which could be generalised to all young female students attending this international school. Instead I set out to present a range of

stories recognizing that no one particular story could encompass all the possibilities in this context. Rather, through these stories I provide insight into *some* possibilities of what, is “intelligible in a specific context” (Chase, 2005, p. 667). In so doing, I set out to bring to life some of the experiences of the young women in this research so that the reader could see, feel, and hear their experiences. For Sparkes (2002), the evocative potential of such narratives is a unique and important quality:

Evoking the emotional texture of felt human experience; providing an audience with more immediate and authentic contact with others different to ourselves; reinforcing the shared subjectivity of experience; hearing the heartbeats of others; illuminating the quest for meaning; living outside of ourselves; perceiving, experiencing, and understanding what has previously been neglected; reorganizing experiences of the familiar; challenging habitual responses to the commonplace; offering new ways of perceiving and interpreting significance; and “breathing together” would all seem worthy goals for researchers to aspire to in their writing (p. 182)

In this research, it is hoped the narratives presented cause readers to resonate with issues that arise from these young women’s experiences in physical activity. Reflecting the feminist underpinnings of this research, it is my hope that this presentation style also provides a scene for social action, As Chase (2005) describes, “When researchers’ interpretive strategies reveal the stranglehold of oppressive metanarratives, they help to open up possibilities for social change” (p. 668). The combination of evocative narratives, quotes from the young women themselves, and my interpretation and analysis of the young women’s physical activity experiences act as an opening; encouraging the reader, whether it be teacher, principal, student, academic or researcher, to not only gain fresh insights and understanding of the young women’s everyday gender and cultural experiences of physicality inside (and outside) the international school setting, but also to reflect upon their own lived experiences in sport, physical activity, physical education classes, and schools. In particular, it is hoped that other PE teachers in similar school environments may gain fresh insights into the complexities of their student’s lives and consider developing new teaching strategies and practices that better cater to their needs.

The narratives are followed by a discussion of key themes and supporting excerpts from the young women's discussions in the focus group and in-depth interviews. Recognizing the notion that language defines and contests social organisation and power and is the place in which one's self /subjectivity is constructed (Birrell, 2000; Denzin, 2004; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005), I aimed to present the narratives alongside the *real* words of the participants. These quotes served to further highlight the themes and present the similarities and differences amongst the young women's perspectives. The combination of narratives and supporting excerpts of young women's experiences in physical activity presents what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) call a "thick description". The aim of a thick description is to create a rich descriptive text which "takes the reader into the setting being described" (Patton, 2002, p. 437). It is my hope that this approach allows the reader to gain greater insight into the young women's understandings and experiences of physical activity, such that they might begin to reflect upon their own assumptions about physically active bodies in different cultures and social contexts (e.g. PE class: Why are my female students not engaged? Why don't my students respond as enthusiastically to my classes as my students at home?)

### ***Validity***

Whilst I am in favour of PSFT, some researchers in the field of positivist and postpositivist inquiry have criticized it for its interpretive criteria (Denzin, 2004; Riessman, 2008). They suggest that there is no way to adequately evaluate work in this field of research as traditional external methods of evaluation are not followed. Poststructural feminists reject this criticism on the grounds that the nature of the two fields of research are entirely different. In contrast to researchers working in the positivistic paradigm who search for 'truths', poststructuralists,

Celebrate uncertainty and attempt to construct texts that did not impose theoretical frameworks on the world. They seek to let the prose of the world speak for itself, while they remain mindful of all the difficulties involved in such a commitment. They, more than their postpositivist

counterparts, are sensitive to voice and to multiple perspectives (Denzin, 2004, p. 465)

The evaluation tools employed by poststructural feminists are based on addressing different research questions about the social world.

When reflecting upon issues of validity in this research I considered the theoretical assumptions of PSFT and the intended narrative purposes of the study. I recognised that there is no one set of formal rules for validation in the area of narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) and instead drew upon an approach that best suited the nature of this inquiry. The creative non-fictional narratives presented in this research were written with the aim of enabling the reader to connect with the stories of the young women in my research. Sparkes (2002) notes the relevance of aesthetic standards for judging fictional representations,

...standard tests like reliability, validity, and replicability are simply not appropriate for judging fiction. Such works are better judged by aesthetic standards, by their emotive force, by their capacity to engage readers emotionally, by their verisimilitude, and by their authenticity or integrity (p. 204)

Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) criteria for reviewing social scientific papers - substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity and impact - proved useful in my consideration of the contributions of my research. Her first criterion of substantive contribution involves a text's contribution to the understanding of social life. She asks whether a paper presents, "a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the real" (p. 964). Sparkes (2002) highlights the ability of narratives to present the reader with such a sense of reality, "the reader can come away from the text with a heightened sensitivity to the life or lives being depicted, and with some flavour of the kinds of events, characters, and social circumstances that circumscribe those lives" (p. 214). I attempted to present some of the 'essence' of these four young women's 'reality', through the use of narratives, to bring to life significant themes emerging from the focus groups and interviews (Patton, 2002). The narratives presented contribute to the understanding of social life as they provide insight into the

cultural, social and gendered experiences of the young women and the contributing social spaces.

When considering aesthetic merit, Richardson and St Pierre (2005) value the use of creative analytical responses that open up the text and invite interpretive responses. Consideration of this criterion was reflected in my use of thick description. The goal of which was to provide the reader with insight into the lives of the young women in order to enable their own interpretations of the research findings. Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) recognises the need for texts to be interesting. Caulley (2008) also deems too many qualitative reports boring to read and suggests creative non-fiction as a plausible solution. It is hoped that the creative non-fiction narratives offered in the following chapter are interesting, informative and perhaps also inspiring for PE teachers and others working with TCK and young women in multicultural contexts.

Reflexivity involves the author's recognition of their subjective position in the research as, "both a producer and a product" of the text (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 964). Neander and Skott (2006) recognise that, "the researcher does not *find* narratives but instead participates in their creation" (p. 297). Indeed, my role as a white Western, young heterosexual, married, physically active PE teacher from New Zealand not only influenced my choice of research questions, methods, theoretical perspectives, and analysis, it also directly influenced my relations with my participants. While the four young women are the focus of this research, I am implicated in every sentence of this thesis. Throughout the research process, however, I attempted to remain reflexive about my roles of researcher and teacher and how my identity as a Western woman may influence my project.

Richardson and St Pierre's (2005) final criterion of impact involves the emotional or intellectual impact of a text. Mattingly (1998) comments, "narratives do not merely refer to past experience but create experiences for their audiences" (p. 8). It is hoped that the narratives presented in this research create an experience which causes readers to resonate with issues that arise from the

young women's experiences in PA and PE. Thus, evoking a response of reflection on the ways these narratives relate to their own stories.

### ***Summary***

Methodological decisions and implementation in this research were underpinned by my assumptions of reality and personal experiences as a post PE student and a current PE teacher. I was drawn to a framework of PSFT. The combination of a focus group, in-depth interviews and narrative inquiry align with this particular framework and provided a means to investigate and analyse the physical activity experiences of young women attending an international school in Taiwan. The following chapter presents my findings in the form of narratives followed by a discussion of key themes evident in this investigation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In Chapter Three I described the methods employed in this study and discussed the relevance of a poststructural feminist perspective and the use of a Bourdieudian approach for exploring the physical activity experiences of four young women attending an international school in Taiwan. In this chapter, I draw upon this Bourdieudian framework to offer an analysis of the data I gathered via focus group and individual interviews. More specifically, I draw upon the concepts of field and capital to examine the complexities of the social spaces in which the young women live, play, perform, learn and socialize, and how their experiences are influenced, negotiated and contested within fields with different social and cultural norms and capital valuation systems. As previously discussed, Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus are relational in the sense that they only function "in relation to one another" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 19). However, it should be noted that, while the concept of habitus will be inherent in subsequent discussions of the young women's embodied experiences of physical activity, my analysis will draw more heavily upon field and capital. According to Laberge and Kay (2002), the concept of habitus is "so theoretically loaded and versatile" that it "becomes less effective for the empirical researcher who needs conceptual tools to identify specific dimensions of 'taste' and social practices as well as specific mechanisms at work in the internalization and externalization of social structure" (p. 262). Given that this study is specifically looking for empirical insights into the young women's lived experiences of physical activity in an international school in Taiwan, combined with the lack of clarity surrounding this concept, I do not overtly employ habitus as a key conceptual tool here. This is not to say, however, that habitus cannot be a fruitful concept for other projects attempting to understand young women's gendered and cultural physical activity experiences.

This chapter consists of two main parts. First, I present seven narratives based on my findings from the focus group and individual interviews. The first narrative 'The search for shoes' utilizes the experiences of touch rugby enthusiast Jessica to reveal some of the socio-cultural stereotypes and struggles facing physically active young women. The second narrative illuminates some of the

motivations and barriers for young women engaging in physical activity, PE and movement more broadly, through Karen's story titled, 'Three minutes'. The third narrative explores how some young women understand and make meaning of culturally appropriate female and male bodies in PE through a story of Renee's experiences titled 'Buff'. The fourth narrative 'Boys will be boys' reveals the young women's frustrations with the dominance of their male peers in PE class. The fifth narrative 'A game for animals' and the sixth narrative 'The final minute' highlight the multiple, and sometimes contrasting, perspectives of competition and physicality held by the young women through Mya's negative, and Jessica's positive, encounters in competitive sporting situations. The final narrative 'The announcement' draws attention to the influential drive for academic excellence in the lives of the young women in this study via the experiences of Renee. The experiences of the four young women involved in this research cannot be generalized to all young women in international schools in Taiwan. However, it is hoped that the 'thick description (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002) offered here provides insights into the complexities of their lived experiences.

In the second part of this chapter, I offer a critical discussion of four themes emerging from the focus group and interviews, and revealed in the seven narratives. First, I describe the various social fields (e.g., family, local community, international school) through which the young women move into, in, and through, in their everyday lives. Following a brief summary of these social fields I examine some of the influential forms of gender and cultural capital within these fields. In particular, I draw attention to accepted femininities and masculinities evident in the experiences of Jessica, Karen, Mya and Renee. This is followed with a presentation of the different motivating and constraining factors in regards to understanding of and involvement in physical activity, in and across these fields. Lastly, I discuss the young women's engagement with the complex world in which they live. Here I draw upon Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of field and capital (and to a less extent, habitus) to explore how the young women's stories are, "constrained by, and strain against, mediating aspects of culture" (Chase, 2005, p. 668). In particular, I focus on the ways in which these young women conceptualise, negotiate and act on their understanding of



gendered and cultured physicality in various social spaces (e.g., PE class, sports team, international school, local community, family).

### ***Fictional tales of young women and physical activity in Taiwan: Seven stories***

#### **1. The search for shoes**

A swarm of girls were gathered in the middle of the field, chatting and giggling while waiting for the coach to arrive. Most were wearing only T-shirts and shorts, Jessica shuddered. The cold breeze whipped her ponytail, the end of it slapping her in the face. Jessica folded her arms, pressing them into her stomach and stomped her feet up and down, trying to generate a little warmth. As she jogged over to the group she noticed that it was in fact two groups. One group was made up of returning players, chatting confidently in raised voices, perhaps reliving antics from last season. The other group looked like the ‘newbies’. As she joined the fringe of the second group, she overheard nervous discussions about the demanding activities of the tryouts. Standing in the huddle of ‘newbies’, Jessica noted that she was not the only one stealing quick glances at the group of ‘real’ touch rugby players just meters away.

Jessica wanted so much to be a part of the other group. In middle school she had often admired the high school varsity girls, who always seemed like such a tight knit group, parading around campus in their IST sports jackets. She wondered if the jackets were warm and how they felt against your skin; she also pondered how it would feel to be included in this group of varsity girls. She had really enjoyed the touch rugby unit in PE the year before, she liked the exhilaration of running with the ball in her hands and passing successfully to her team-mates. She decided then that she wanted to try out when she got to high school. This was her chance to be part of that group. She took another quick glance at the older girls. Not only were they all wearing the token IST jackets but they also were wearing fancy looking turf shoes. Jessica felt a rush of excitement. She might not be able to get an IST jacket right away but she could certainly get some of those special shoes.

The coach arrived and the drills began. It didn't take long for the coach to notice Jessica's speed. He signalled Jessica and another girl Katy to join a pair of returning players for the next drill. The two newbies exchanged nervous glances and smiles as they jogged over to their new group. The older girls introduced themselves and one added, "Hey I hope you make it on the team, we need some speedsters to replace the two seniors that left last year." Jessica could hardly contain her delight. The IST jacket was in her grasp. All she needed was for the coach to give her the nod. Jessica passed, dodged, caught and ran as fast and as hard as she could for the rest of the session.

After the try out Jessica walked off the field proud to be mingling with the older girls as they headed to the locker rooms. There would be two more days of tryouts before the coach would decide on the team. Jessica was happy with how things had gone in the first session but knew it was hard for a freshman to make a Varsity team so she tried hard not to get her hopes too high. As she walked shoulder to shoulder with the other girls she looked down and noticed the fancy turf shoes. She asked the girl closest on her left where she could get a pair. The girl turned and replied with a laugh, "You'll be lucky to find these here. I had to order mine online from the States." Another girl added, "Yeah I could only get a guy's size here." She stopped walking and waggled her toes up and down inside the shoe; Jessica could see the little toe mounds well away from the end of the shoe. "I have the smallest size I could find but I still have to wear two pairs of socks to take up some room in here," she added before jogging off leaving Jessica to wonder how she could get her hands on a new pair of special shoes. Unfazed, Jessica decided to have a look in the city after school anyway.

The store's walls were lined with all types of sports shoes; the rubbery smell of new shoes was intoxicating. It reminded Jessica of the locker rooms earlier in the day when the older girls had been lacing up their new shoes. She imagined herself sitting on the bench next to real touch rugby players at tomorrow's try out; she would be lacing up her own new shoes. Scanning the rows of shoes Jessica thought to herself, "Surely there must be a pair in here that will fit". But she was not having much luck. This was the third sports store she

had visited. No one seemed to be selling women's shoes. "This is ridiculous," thought Jessica as she looked over one giant man shoe after another.

Then she spotted them. A smallish looking pair in blue and silver, "Perfect", "Do you have these in a women's size 8?" she asked the tall sporty looking store assistant. "Oh, no I'm sorry we do not stock women's cleats. However you could try this model in the largest boys youth size we have" he replied. Jessica's heart sank but she agreed to try them on just in case.

The attendant came back with a box, opening it to reveal two tissue wrapped boots. He placed one of the shoes in Jessica's outstretched hand. She slid her foot into it. The sides clamped in and her toes pushed up harshly against the front. There was no way she could run in these let alone play touch rugby. Unable to contain her frustration, she blurted, "Why don't you sell female sports apparel? I'm trying out for a touch rugby team and I can't even find any new shoes!" The store assistant took a step back, perhaps unaccustomed to such outbursts from female customers and stammered, "We tried in the past, but if we sell women's sports shoes no one buys them, they just sit there gathering dust, so we have given up. Taiwanese women just aren't that sporty." Exacerbated by his response, Jessica stood up and marched straight out of the store. As she passed the rows of beautiful male shoes, she felt them laughing at her. Overcome with frustration and exhaustion she decided to go straight home and order a pair online.

## **2. Three minutes**

Glancing up at the clock, Karen was relieved to see that there was only 3 minutes remaining until the end of class. The morning block always seemed to go so slowly. Her mind felt numb, she needed a break badly. Two 80 minute classes in a row was a pretty tough ask for any 15 year old. Towards the end of her second class she couldn't help but get fidgety. No seated position felt comfortable. She crossed her legs and sat up. She uncrossed them and slouched. No, nothing felt comfortable. She pushed her weight back into the chair, tilting it so she was perched on its two back legs. If she twisted her head just right she could get a good view out the window of the fourth floor. The brilliant green of

the artificial turf was speckled with erratically moving grey PE shirts. Some type of tag game was going on. Karen couldn't wait to be out there, free of the mustard brick and grey concrete slab building. Away from the glare of the computer screen and the squeaking white board markers.

Karen looked at the clock again, 2 minutes. She linked her hands together and stretched her arms upwards. 1 minute to go. She packed up her books and laptop. The bell rang, class had finally ended, and she bolted for the door. Speeding down the four flights of stairs to the PE locker rooms, she quickly changed and shoved her belongings into the locker. She pushed open the doors and stepped out onto the track, squinting at first as she adjusted to the bright sunshine. "Ahhhhhh" Jessica breathed out, it was such a relief to be outside.

The class was already beginning to gather at the start line, getting ready for the compulsory warm up laps. It was definitely not Karen's favourite part of PE, but she knew it was good for her. Walking over to join her PE buddies, Samantha and Catherine, she heard Samantha exclaim: "Phew, lucky we have PE today, I had a huge dinner last night," while patting her stomach. The energetic, athletic teacher arrived and promptly announced, "1 mile today!" her Australian accent making it sound like a treat. The boys had already taken their first strides when Karen realized that she had better get her legs moving. The first few laps weren't too bad. Karen was able to run and chat with her buddies, catching up on assignments and the latest gossip in the girly magazines. The final lap, however, was extremely painful. Her lungs were heaving, she felt like throwing up and her legs felt so very, very heavy. As Karen ran past a block of classrooms she could see through the windows students bent over laptops and textbooks. The thought of being locked at a desk shovelling information in a stuffy classroom made Karen straighten up and drive her arms back, finishing off the final straight with vigour. At the completion of the run her fringe was plastered to her forehead with sweat, her shirt was sticking so tightly to her body that even her belly button was showing and she felt disgusting. As she slowly regained her breath she chanted to herself: "this is good for me, this has got to be good for me."

### 3. Buff

The beat of the music shook the speakers. It almost drowned out the clinking of the metal weights and the hum of the treadmill. Renee slowed the treadmill to a walking pace and looked around the room and tried to decide what activity to do next.

A group of guys were crowded around Paul who was lying on the bench press. Each end of the bar above him was loaded with chunky metal plates. One of the spectators grunted his encouragement, "Yeah Paul, who da man!" Paul was gripping the bar so tight the whites of his knuckles were showing. He let out a groan as he lifted the bar off its rack. The spectators sucked in a breath of air sharing his pain. One guy hollered excitedly, "Come on Paul, give it heaps!" Paul slowly lowered the bar holding it just above his chest, his whole body taut, muscles hard and swollen.

The bar sagged under the weight. Paul's face melted into a blotchy red grimace. He puffed his cheeks up and held his breath for a moment, his arms shaking with the strain. A tiny bead of sweat formed on his forehead and trickled down the side of his face. The crowd was silent, arms crossed tightly, leaning forwards willing the bar upwards. Paul's howl cracked the silence as he pushed the bar upwards. The guys whooped with excitement as Paul held the bar high. One of the guys helped him slot it back on the rack. He stood up shaking out his arms and was hit from all directions with congratulatory high fives, back slaps and arm punches.

Renee was pretty impressed. The display of effort motivated her to get moving. She was certainly not going to pick the bench press to do after that performance, but she wanted to do something. She walked past the bench press and stopped at the arm extension. She was actually pretty proud of her strength. She had been doing taekwondo for the past 3 years and was quietly confident in the power that she had developed. She was surprised to see that the pin was sticking in the block of weights only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the way down. Michael had been on the machine before her. Renee pulled out the pin and pushed it back in at her usual slot  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the way down, smiling as she realised that she could lift more

than a guy. Standing up she gripped the shiny metal bar in front of her and pushed down. It felt good watching the block glide up so easily. Her arms only started to shake on the final rep. She thought maybe she could even lift a little more. As she bent down to readjust the pin she could hear Michael behind her sniggering to his friend Kevin, “look at Renee trying to be a guy, even her arms are bulging.” Renee looked down at the small metal pin in her hand as she considered what to do. She was horrified at Michael’s description of her arms. Turning the pin over in her hands she sighed. She reached up and slid the pin into the smallest top block and carried on as if nothing had happened.

#### **4. Boys will be boys**

There was only a group of anxious looking girls and one boy remaining on the field. Eyes averted, hands in pockets, feet scuffing at the turf. All the boys had already been hastily snatched up by each captain. Now the process slowed right down. Brian and James, hands firmly placed on hips, scanned the group of girls in front of them. Renee consciously looked away, pretending something had caught her eye on the other side of the field, desperately trying to give the impression that she didn’t care when she got picked.

The sporty girls got picked next. Then the captains’ attention moved onto what Renee called the ‘drags of the class’, the people who were not very good at sports. Renee was bending down to adjust her already perfectly tied shoelace, when she heard James say, “I’ll take Renee.” Renee stood up letting out a long slow breath, surprising herself that she had even been holding it. She crossed over to her new group, relieved that this part of the lesson was over for today. She couldn’t look directly at the ‘drags’ still standing on the field, she knew all too well the discomfort of the group glares; their eyes pushing and pulling at you, making you feel vulnerable. She already knew who would be left; the two girls with the dangly earrings, and the guy who ‘acted like a girl’.

Finally the selection process was over and Renee walked with her team to their designated side of the field. As they walked James allotted playing positions. The guy who ‘acted like a girl’ was to be the goalie. Most of the remaining ‘drags’ would be the defenders with a few, including Renee today,

lucky enough to be given a midfield position, just to be 'fair'. The remaining sporty people were, as always, up in the scoring positions.

Renee actually liked to play soccer. On weekends she would often kick a ball around with her younger brother. She had been careful to not let this be known to others in the class as it just didn't make sense, how could someone like a sport if they weren't that good at it? James kicked off and the game began. Today was the same as any other day. No matter how hard Renee ran, or how loudly she called for the ball, the boys would not pass to her.

Finally she managed to get a great intercept and dribbled it out into the open. She could hear the boy strikers yelling, "Here! Here!", "Pass, Pass!" Renee was sick of their yelling and wanted to yell back at them, "stuff off, you never pass to me!" Renee could see that the goalie was not worried at all. Fed up with their attitude she decided she would take a shot herself. "Nooooo!" The strikers cried as she swung her foot backwards for the kick. The speed of the kick took the goalie by surprise, he moved too late and the ball rolled on past him. Renee couldn't believe it, she had scored her first soccer goal! She clapped her hands together, laughing, the ball had actually made it. Her previous lump of anger was replaced with delight. In truth she was also a little bit relieved that she had been successful. She was not in the mood to deal with the following grimaces and remarks if she had failed.

Her joy was short lived though as the goalie yelled out, "I was just letting it through to be nice to her!" Even the strikers on Renee's own team laughed.

## **5. A game for animals**

It was the last minute of the game. Red faced, yelling, sweaty boys and girls were rushing crazily up and down the court in mad pursuit of the bouncing orange ball. Mya moved backwards, as close to the edge of the court as possible, wishing she was anywhere but here. She was trying to fade into the background so that no one would pass her the ball. Touching the ball opened the door to ridicule.

All of a sudden the ball was coming directly towards her. She panicked but had no choice but to react as best she could. She outstretched her hands and braced herself for the impact. She felt a rush of relief as she sensed the ball in her grasp, and then the hit came. Not from the ball, but from another player attempting an intercept. All of a sudden there were two sets of hands on the ball. Mya lost her balance and began to fall. To her surprise the other girl continued to fight for possession. Mya hit the ground with a thump as the other girl landed on top of her. The wide eyed desperation of the girl still trying to get possession of the ball disgusted Mya. This girl had already knocked her to the ground and now she was still fighting for possession. Unbelievable. In the fall Mya had ended with a better grip on the ball and wrenched it away from the other player. Mya felt rage bubbling up inside her. It was like sporty girls weren't human at all. She thought to herself, "Whatever happened to helping someone up who you knock down?" She wanted to slap the other girl so badly. She shoved the ball at other girl pushing her away, it dropped to the ground as Mya let go.

"Last goal wins" the teacher called out from the far away sideline, oblivious to what had just occurred. The other girl scooped up the ball eagerly and took off towards the goal. Mya stayed sitting on the ground until the ball was passed off and successfully shot through the hoop. She then stood up and made her way to the lockers vowing to stay as far away from that orange ball as possible in the next lesson, and the next.

## **6. The final minute**

It was game point. Jessica passed the ball back to the server. The pass was short, the ball bounced on the wooden floor sending an echo through the quiet gym. Both teams were on edge. James, Jessica's teams' captain signalled their side in for a quick team talk. The opposite team followed his lead.

Jessica loved this atmosphere. They had been in the same teams for the last few weeks building up to this tournament. It made the whole event seem so much more serious. Everyone was trying really hard. Even the students who had not been very good at first had tried really hard to improve. Each game meant a lot.



The team crowded in so close that Jessica could smell the berry-flavoured gum being chewed nervously by one of her team-mates: “Come on guys we are so close, let’s give it heaps! Panthers on three ok” James said enthusiastically as he held out his hand. The rest of the team put their hands on top of his. “One, two, three”... “PANTHERS!” they yelled. Jessica’s heart was thumping with excitement.

The team settled back into their positions on the court. Jessica was one of the three in the front row. She wiped her clammy hands on her shorts and gave the thumbs up sign to Brian and Andrew on either side of her, they grinned back. Their teammate served the ball across fast and it was returned faster. One of the Panthers players in the back row dived to receive it, her skin screeching across the floor boards. Her dive was worth it, the ball bounced off her hands right next to Jessica. She got underneath it holding her breath as she watched it fall towards her, she flicked out her fingers on contact and the ball popped up perfectly above Brian. Jessica gritted her teeth and clenched her fists willing Brian to win the point. He jumped up and spiked the ball with a massive slap down into the other court. It was blocked by an opposing player and came hurtling back to the Panthers’ side. Andrew reached it and set it up above Jessica. The ball was moving towards her with speed and force. This was the point that mattered. With a yell she jumped up and spiked it as hard as she could. As she dropped to the ground she watched the white blur through the mesh of the net. It disappeared as someone dived to reach it. The noise of a ball bouncing on a wooden floor had never sounded so good. The game was over. She was ecstatic and so was her team. The players on the benches leapt up, swarming to the middle of the court, everyone was high fiving each other yelling “PANTHERS! PANTHERS!”

## **7. The announcement**

Renee was so excited that she accidentally hit the wrong button in the elevator. The doors opened on the floor below her home. She couldn’t wait. She ran out of the elevator and up the flight of stairs to her floor. She swung open the heavy metal door and announced breathlessly, “I am going to be a break dancer!”

Renee couldn't see anyone in the lounge so she ran through the kitchen door narrowly missing thumping into her Dad. He was making his way into the lounge to find out what the commotion was about. Glad that someone was home she repeated again, "I am going to be a break dancer!" Her Dad's eyebrows lifted as he sucked in a thin breath of air, "Is this a joke?" he asked. "Of course not!" Renee exclaimed, "I saw the group dancing today after school in the cafeteria, oh the music and the moves were amazing, I just know that with a bit of practice I could actually be pretty good." Her Dad carried on walking into the lounge and sat down on the couch. He picked up the newspaper and calmly stated, "Now my dear, you should really think about this decision seriously. You are in High School now and you need to get into college, and not just any college, a good college." The paper rustled as he turned a page, "Your grades are ok, but they could be better. You really need to consider if this is going to be a good way to spend your time." His final remark snuffed out Renee's last glowing ember of excitement.

She sat down, deflated, on the opposite couch. Her school bag digging into her back. Reaching behind her to pull it off, she felt anger surging inside her stomach, rising into her throat. She clenched her fists tightly around the bag straps and tried to stay calm. But she couldn't keep it in. She stood up and yelled, "This is just like my drawing, you tried to stop me from doing that too!" Renee threw her bag to the ground and ran to her room slamming the door behind her. She slumped down at her desk, not sure whether to cry or yell, or scream into her pillow. She was just so angry. It was so unfair. She was bound by a future career, something that she would not begin for another decade, but its presence felt like it was forever looming over everything she did, or dreamed to do.

### ***Making meaning of young women's physical activity experiences in Taiwan: A theoretical discussion***

The seven narratives presented above provide insight into Mya, Jessica, Karen and Renee's experiences of physical activity in various social spaces and places. While some of the experiences revealed in these narratives were unique to each young woman, some key themes also wove through these narratives. In this

part, I will offer a theoretical discussion of these themes. In so doing, the following discussion consists of four parts. First, I describe the various social fields (e.g., family, local community, international school) through which the young women move into, within and through, in their everyday lives. Following a brief summary of these social fields I examine some of the influential forms of gender and cultural capital in these fields. In particular, I draw attention to accepted femininities and masculinities in the experiences of Jessica, Karen, Mya and Renee. This is followed with a presentation of the different motivating and constraining factors in regards to understanding of, and involvement in physical activity, in and across these fields. Lastly, I discuss the young women's engagement with the complex world in which they live.

## **Fields**

As revealed in the above narratives, the young women in this research participate in a range of social spaces or 'fields' including the family, the local community and the international school (see figure-1, p. 38). Each field, however, is not an isolated social space, but rather, intersects and/or lies within other fields. While valuation systems of various forms of capital are unique to each field, occasionally the young women 'transport' these values and expectations into and across other fields. For example, the young women's value of academic achievement, which is significant in the family and local community fields, was also influential in the international school field. As elaborated on in the following sections, this transporting of values sometimes causes internal conflict and tensions regarding contrasting and/or contradictory cultural and gender norms and practices.

## **The family**

Mya, Renee, Karen and Jessica presented the family as a significant social space in their lives, thus, supporting the work of Dagkas and Stathi (2007), Kay (2006), and Vu et al., (2006). This field involved the immediate family, including parents and siblings. As presented in previous research examining the impact of the family on youth in Taiwan (Yu et al., 2004), this field was presented as a social space which strongly supported the achievement of a good education and a successful career. For example, Mya commented, "Asian parents tend to be really

pushy... they always want the child to be really successful. They think that can be achieved from getting really high grades”. This academic focus reflected the influential presence of academic capital in the family field. Physical activity was not regarded as highly as academic achievement in the family field; however, similar to the work of Flintoff and Scraton (2001), it was often justified by its assumed contribution to the avoidance of illness and the ability to keep fit. As Jessica emphasised, in her discussion of her parents motivation to work out regularly in order to “stay in shape”, the presence of health capital was influential within the family field also.

### **The local community**

In line with the findings of Allen (2002) the local community was another important social space influencing the everyday experiences of the young women; in this regard, the inner-city Taiwanese community seemed to be particularly significant in their lives. Similar to the findings of Yu et al., (2004), the significance of the local community field became especially apparent in the young women’s discussions about the importance of academic achievement. The term ‘Asian mentality’ was used to describe this particular focus on academic capital in the social space of the local community. Reflecting on the impact of an ‘Asian mentality’ in this field, Jessica commented, “I think Asian parents are brought up like that. The people surrounding them are all focused on schoolwork so they might think like that’s the right thing. They don’t want to be different, they just want to follow everyone else”. Similar to the family field, the local community field was also presented as a space, which placed little value on women’s participation in physical activity. Jessica believed that many people in the local community, “think we are weak, they think girls should not participate in any physical activity”. Such findings support previous research focused on young women in Taiwan (Chiang, 2000; Lin, 2008; Yu et al., 2004), as it reflects valuation systems in this field in which young women were expected to seek particular forms of gender capital (e.g., the dutiful daughter, the good student, the thin/passive/quiet young woman) but have limited access to physical capital.

## **The international school**

The findings from my study indicate that the international school holds a significant social space in the lives of the students. Similar conclusions have been reached in previous research (Bresler & Ardichvili, 2002; Hayden, 1998; Haywood, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). When considering the values of the international school field, the young women initially presented it as a social space which was representative of ‘American’ or ‘Western’ values. However, after further discussions with my participants it became apparent that this field was also strongly influenced by values from the local community and family fields. For example, it was evident that the focus on academic achievement at IST was a result of similar values in the fields of the local community and family.

One of two influential sub-fields of the international school field was the PE class. The PE class, a focus of the questioning, was a social space in which the students resided for 80minutes every second school day. As Azzarito and Solomon (2006), Garrett (2004) and Van Daalen (2005) also suggest competitive sports dominated this field; therefore, physical competence and a competitive drive were significant forms of capital. In addition, the young women’s discussions of experiences in this field also highlighted the influence of physical capital in their perceptions of males and females as polar opposites a finding recognized in the work of Azzarito and Solomon (2006), Garrett (2004) and Van Daalen (2005). Such physical capital was apparent in the young women’s assumptions of gender appropriate physicality categorizing girls as, “emotional”, “quiet”, “complainers” and boys as, “physical”, “loud” and “intense” in the PE field. In addition, similar to findings in the work of Deem and Gilroy (1998) and Garrett (2004), narrow conceptions of idealized body types were also presented in this field, such as the perceived ‘normality’ of the thin Asian model physique.

The second significant sub-field of the international school field was sports teams. As the seven narratives at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, the young women perceived and participated in the sports team field in various ways. The valuation system within the sport field was distinct from the family, community and school fields which highly value cultural capital and economic capital; in the sport field, physical capital is most highly valued. In contrast to

subjects in the work of Deem and Gilroy (1998) and Flintoff and Scraton (2001), who had numerous opportunities to participate in school sport no matter what their level of physical competence, for the young women in my study participation in a sports team was limited to only those demonstrating the most physical prowess and skill. To be able to participate in this sub-field was an achievement in itself. As demonstrated in the narrative ‘the search for shoes’, there was tough competition to make a sports team as the school did not offer very many, consequently only the best athletes had access to this social field. These teams focused on winning; as a result physical competence and a competitive drive were dominant forms of capital in this social field.

### ***Being a physically active female/male in a global community***

As the young women moved into, within and through the fields of the family, local community and international school they negotiated influential forms of capital (e.g., academic, physical, health, gender, cultural). Of particular interest in this study was the influence of cultural and gendered capital. Accepted femininities and masculinities evident in the comments of the four young women provided some insight into the influence of gender and cultural capital in their lives. During the focus group and in-depth interviews the four young women expressed numerous Western stereotypical gender assumptions in relation to males and females in physical activity and PE, as well as some gender stereotypes unique to the Asian society. These assumptions were apparent in the young women’s discussion of gender appropriate behaviours, perceptions of bodies and beauty, and gender appropriate physical activity.

### **Appropriate behaviours**

During discussions about female experiences in PE, traditional Taiwanese assumptions of gender appropriate behaviours were evident. Similar to Confucian principles of feminine behaviour outlined by Lin (2008), Karen, Mya and Renee accepted girls’ as ‘naturally’ emotional, quiet and polite in temperament. Karen explained, “Girls are more emotional than guys so maybe when they do an activity they put more emotional feelings into it rather than physical”. On a similar note, Mya said that girls, “are more quiet and subtle... they are not like

guys shouting all over the place with sweat dripping everywhere”. Jessica was the only young woman who was frustrated by such behaviours. She described the typical behaviour of girls’ in PE classes, “They stand on the side and chat, they are scared of the ball, or they just don’t want to play”. However, she distanced herself from this group, making it clear that she did not fit with this stereotype, “I feel like girls should also take it more seriously rather than just for fun”.

In contrast to assumptions of female appropriate behaviour in PE, reflecting findings in the work of Scraton (1992) and Wright (1995), the young women described the boy’s behaviour in PE to be considerably more physical than that of their female peers. Jessica commented, “The guys are more intense... like they actually practice a lot and have tutors to become good”. Karen compared the boys and girls approaches to PE, “I think they get more into it and trying and things, they are more motivated. Guys are probably more physical and think less about emotions”. Mya justified the boy’s active participation in PE as a result of a perception of gender as a ‘natural’ occurrence,

They are pretty active and competitive between boys, and boys and are pretty loud and they do like to compete... guys tend naturally to have higher testosterone and they’re less patient basically, and they’re just more manly in general and sporty.

Although the majority of the young women accepted traditional Taiwanese assumptions of appropriate female and male physical activity and PE experiences, they all recognised that there were exceptions to their generalisations. This was apparent in their discussion of characteristics of ‘tomboys’ and ‘tomgirls’. ‘Tomboys’ was the label given to young women who demonstrated traditionally defined masculine characteristics (e.g., competitiveness, aggression, physical prowess). Karen described tomboys as, “not afraid to try something... more adventurous, they wouldn’t mind sweating... they don’t complain as much”. Mya described a friend who fitted in this category, “tomboys tend to really love sports and play it all the time, and they are loud and just boyish”. ‘Tomgirls’ on the other hand were boys who embodied traditionally defined female traits (e.g., passive, non athletic, emotional). Karen depicted these boys as having, “a personality that is not really into sports”. Describing a ‘tomgirl’ friend Mya noted, “He is not into sports, he’s more like a girl, he’s

really calm and likes meditation and all that sort of stuff.” Karen, Mya, Renee and Jessica all agreed that ‘tomboys’ were often admired in the PE class and sports team fields for their competence in physical activities. However, similar to the findings of Vu et al., (2006), Mya, Renee and Jessica also recognised that ‘tomboys’ could intimidate the boys. The young women recognised that boys would tease, ridicule or put down these ‘tomboys’ in an effort to maintain their status as physically dominant. It appeared that a boy’s physical capital was devalued if a girl presented a similar, or in some cases, superior level of physical prowess.

Mixed perceptions were presented about the consequences of boys being ‘tomgirls’. Similar to Nayak and Kehily’s (2008) concept of “sissy boys” as a form of failed masculinity, Jessica felt that being a ‘tomgirl’ was often an embarrassment for some students. She referred to ridiculing remarks such as, “oh you play worse than a girl” suggesting that ‘tomgirls’ were often ridiculed because they did not possess specific physical capital which was an expected male characteristic in the PE field. The other three young women, however, thought it was insignificant to be a ‘tomgirl’, reflecting a perception that it was not always essential for a male to demonstrate physical competence and strength in this social setting.

The young women’s recognition of ‘tomboys’ and ‘tomgirls’ presented some exceptions to generalizations, however, building upon the work of Cockburn and Clarke (2002), the concept of a tomboy’s physical attributes and a ‘tomgirls’ lack of physical attributes seemed to contribute to young women being presented as inferior to a masculine ideal. As such, findings in this study suggest that traditional Taiwanese assumptions of femininity significantly influenced the majority of the young women’s perceptions of gender appropriate behaviours. Aside from Jessica, the young women seemed to perceive themselves as less physical (and inferior) to their male peers.

### **Bodies and beauty**

Forms of gender and cultural capital were not only reflected in assumptions of appropriate physical behaviours, they were also evident in the



young women's perceptions of bodies and beauty. Discussions stimulated by the use of images of various Western and Asian bodies (presented in in-depth interviews) revealed assumptions about desired body types and their related physicality. These stereotypes were associated with accepted gender behaviours which reinforced particular forms of engagement in physical activity.

Mya, Jessica, Renee and Karen's perception of beauty was often confined to that of a slim Asian model physique. When asked which of the body images displayed characteristics that the young women were either, happy they had, or wished they had, all of the young women selected the thin Asian model. The young women all described the slim female body as commonplace or an expectation. Karen explained, "I know that my basic body structure probably won't be that skinny but I just want to be 'normal', like I don't want to be really really skinny or like overweight or anything". When asked how she thought her class mates would respond if the model in the photo joined her PE class, Renee replied, "Just normal, she is just another ordinary girl". Frost (2005) notes, "there has to be a standard of 'normal' in operation to understand stigma" (p. 79). This was apparent in my findings, as a perceived 'normality' of the slim Asian model body type served to reinforce particular female gender stereotypes. This resulting 'thin ideal' is evident in numerous studies of young women and PE (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Frost, 2005; Garrett, 2004; Hills, 2006; Whitehead & Biddle, 2008). Elements of culturally appropriate physical and behavioural female characteristics were also apparent in Renee's description of the Asian model as, "more a normal IST person because she is not that muscley and she looks like she doesn't like to do sports, she's a more girlish person". For Renee, 'girlishness' referred to, "always staying still, and acting really calm and doing nothing of sports". Some of the young women expanded upon cultural expectations of the female physique. For example, Mya commented, "People in Taiwan they like skinny girls... not really like a buff gym person". In support of Hills (2006), perceptions of the relationship between gender and physicality served to both enhance and inhibit young women's desire to participate in physical activity. While perceptions of gender and physicality motivated young women's involvement in particular physical activities, such involvement was

often limited to activities associated with achieving the culturally desired 'slim' Asian model body type rather than a muscular physique.

While the four young women agreed that the thin, unathletic, passive Taiwanese woman represented the feminine ideal, their readings of the 'attractive' male body were much more diverse. For example, when shown images of a muscular young Asian man and a thin young Asian man Mya explained, "I think that they're both going to be good looking in Taiwan, because in Taiwan there are some really skinny guys." Again, when discussing traits they deemed attractive in the images of young men, my participants all mentioned physical *and* behavioural characteristics. For example Jessica stated, "They would have to be tall and strong". When asked to expand upon what she meant by 'strong' she responded, "they are not fat or chubby and they have to be like smart or athletic". It was interesting to note Jessica's mention of "smart" as an attractive characteristic, perhaps reflecting the ever present influence of academic capital.

A significant perception, held by all the young women, was that muscle was unattractive and not necessary for females. These desires reflected particular physical capital in this social setting. It was apparent from their discussion of the images of muscular women (shown during in-depth interviews) that they were conscious of not gaining too much muscle during physical activity and PE. Mya said,

I don't have an urge or eagerness to have such muscle. First, you are going to get a lot of stares, and second I don't feel the need for it, and third, it's not like I think "oh girls, just because you are girls you can't be buff", but I just think there's not a necessity for it.

Jessica also supported this stance and thought it made females look "rough". The young women felt that it was not necessary that females be physically strong, suggesting that it was a redundant physical attribute. Initially Renee challenged the assumptions about muscles on females, "This person looks really strong she has like arm muscles. Guys wouldn't like her but I think she is really cool". The narrative 'Buff' was based on Renee's discussion about muscle in which she

grappled with different opinions. During our conversations, Renee's opinion changed as she reflected further upon her own experience,

Girls who actually have that kind of muscle, there is going to be some problems... like I have a muscle on my arms also and guys always tease me about it, like "oh you are not a girl you are a guy you see you have muscles".

These findings build upon the work of Kirk and Tinning (1994) who found young women often perceived a muscular physique as exclusively male and therefore it was viewed as strange and unattractive, and in a sense was perceived as threatening the 'norm' of femininity. These assumptions formed the habitus which served to reinforce notions of physical capital in this social setting. This finding supports the work of Kirk and Tinning (1994) as they link the process of young people making sense of their bodies to gender discourses of appearance, size, shape and muscularity. In particular, they present muscularity as a bodily male signifier and slenderness as the female bodily signifier. The gender and physical capital of the slim, un-muscular 'feminine ideal' in the broader field of Taiwan is unlike the 'feminine' ideal in America, which is increasingly celebrating the "lean and toned" athletic female body (Steele, 2005). Thus, supporting the notion that forms of physical capital are field specific (Crossley, 2001).

### **Appropriate physical activity**

The young women's perceptions of appropriate gendered and cultured behaviour and beauty consequentially influenced their understandings of appropriate physical activity. The young women's ingrained stereotypes of male and female physicality became most apparent when discussing activities best suited to males and females. Jessica, Mya and Karen expressed assumptions about female specific activities being related to feminine activities of yoga, badminton and dance. Similar to the work of Garrett (2004) and Scraton (1992) these activities demonstrated an acceptance of female physical activity to be less physically demanding than boys. In our discussions of male specific physical activity, gender stereotypes emerged again in the responses of three of the young women. Jessica, Mya and Karen described body building, basketball and rugby as activities better suited to males, activities reflecting assumptions of appropriate

male characteristics of strength, speed and intense activity. Only Renee challenged stereotypical assumptions of gender appropriate physical activity when she commented, “I think most of the activities are all for everyone”. Supporting the work of Hills (2006) and McNay (2000), her challenge was likely a result of her involvement in Taekwondo, an activity which valued characteristics of strength, speed and intensity and contrasted with the widely accepted perceptions of appropriate gendered physical activity mentioned by her peers.

Contrary to findings in the work of Hanson (2005) who suggested that young Asian American women had increasingly open attitudes towards non-traditional activity, findings in this study suggest that the young women’s accepted femininities and masculinities were significantly influenced by traditional Taiwanese assumptions of gender appropriate behaviour. This in turn often confined perceptions of female beauty to a slim Asian model physique. As a result the young women’s perceptions of appropriate physical activity were frequently restricted to activities which avoided the development of ‘male’ like (muscular) characteristics, but would rather contribute to achieving the slim physique.

### ***Motives and constraints in young women’s physical activity participation***

The young women’s gendered and cultural assumptions of appropriate forms of femininity and masculinity shaped their understanding of, and engagement in physical activity in different ways. The following section discusses the ways in which these assumptions served to both motivate and constrain engagement in physical activity. The findings in this research project presented a range of motivating and constraining factors associated with various forms of capital, which influenced the place of physical activity in the young women’s lives. Influential forms of capital present both in and across social fields included health capital, academic capital, and physical capital. While these forms of capital were present across all fields, it is important to note that the valuation systems in and across different fields varied considerably.

### **Traditional Taiwanese doctrines**

According to Yu et al., (2004), the existence of traditional doctrines in Taiwanese society indirectly deny opportunities for women to become involved in physical activity. They explain that the continuing presence of Confucian values which require women to, “dedicate their whole life to their family” and be, “mild, tender and self-sacrificing” are the total opposite of the competitive and achievement-oriented characteristics of physical activity (p. 381). Consistent with this belief, findings in my research illustrate a lack of perceived importance for physical activity for women in the local community field. This is evident in the narratives ‘The search for shoes’ and ‘The announcement’. According to Hanson (2005), role expectations in Asian culture tend to focus on women as wives and homemakers. This perception was present in discussions with each of the young women in this study. For example, Mya commented,

They [people in the community] think girls should just be the normal house wife kind of woman, or just stay home and take care of the kids. Or if they do have a profession, they would be like an office type person.

Comments such as this reflected time-honoured Taiwanese beliefs about the traditional role of women in society evident in several studies of young women in Taiwan (Chiang, 2000; Liu, 2002; Yu et al., 2002). This societal perception reflected a particular cultural habitus in the broader Taiwanese community field and family field, which had the possibility of limiting physical activity opportunities for young women to participate in a diverse range of physical activities.

### **The value of academic achievement**

All four young women in this study expressed an awareness of the dominating focus on academics in their family, local community, and at IST. The importance of academic achievement and a good career influenced the young women’s perceptions, of, and engagement in, physical activity.

Findings in this research present a significant cultural belief within the family, local community and international school fields that academic achievement (e.g., high grades, entrance into prestigious colleges) and an

esteemed occupation (e.g., doctor, lawyer) were of ultimate value. Mya described this as the 'Asian mentality',

We are in an Asian country, and Asian parents tend to be really pushy. Their demands are really high. When students say I failed a test, they say, did you really fail or did you Asian fail? An Asian fail is like a B or a B-, or even B+, so I think its Asian, the pressure comes from the parents... in Asian culture they want to fit as much information in the child as possible and they always want the child to be really successful. They think that can be achieved from getting really high grades. Like over the years they [IST] used to give a lot less homework than they do now because the majority of the parents and students were Western, and now it's completely changed, it's just mostly Asians with American passports, but the mentality is still Asian.

The never-ending quest for academic achievement was apparent in the choices students and parents made about physical activity. For example Jessica's involvement in after school sport was justified by its contribution to her academic success, "Both my parents think sport is a good thing because it makes you have better time management. My mum thinks that once I start doing sports, when I come home I do my homework without procrastinating". Not all parents, however, believed that physical activity could contribute to academic achievement. Contrary to the findings of Whitehead and Biddle's United States based study (2008) and Vu et al.,'s United Kingdom based investigation (2006), parents contributed more often to constraining involvement in physical activity that motivating. The narrative 'The announcement' was based upon the difficulties Renee faced when she wanted to participate in breakdancing. Her parents placed considerable importance on academics in order to have a good career and as such anything that did not contribute to this was not as important. She explained,

They think mostly if it's not a lot of studying and you are not going to do it [as a career] then you shouldn't do it. Like for my drawing too... my parents they keep telling me if you are not going to do art as a career you are not supposed to do art.

Such findings support the work of Liu (2002) who recognized the importance placed on academics in the family and broader Taiwanese community to be a constraint on other areas of student interest. Involvement in breakdancing did not fit with the habitus of the family field or the broader Taiwanese field in which a successful career was highly valued. It was not career orientated; therefore Renee's parents discouraged her from participating in it. This finding supports the work of Yu et al., (2004) who indicate that in Taiwanese culture there is a hierarchy in the type of job a person acquires which reflects social status. At first Renee challenged this stance. However, on further reflection she accepted the value system of the family field. When asked about what she wanted to do as a profession Renee said she wanted to do something in the area of business. When asked if she could do both business and other activities she enjoyed, she thought it would be possible to do both but responded in line with what appeared to be the norms and rules of the field, "One of them has to be the major one, one of them has to be the minor one" thus, illustrating the enduring nature of her habitus ingrained since childhood and continuously reinforced in the fields of family, school and broader Taiwanese culture. For the young women in this research physical activity did not contribute to their career goals, therefore, their parents perceived it to be of lesser value. This was apparent in Jessica's comment, "they'll think physical activity is a waste of time, because if it's just for fun... you won't have a career out of it. You might as well just practice on one thing and be really good at it". Flintoff and Scraton (2001), found that although PE classes seldom offered young women in the United Kingdom relevant and meaningful experiences in physical activity, they were still involved in numerous physical activity pursuits outside of school. Contrary to Flintoff and Scraton's (2001) findings, the young women in my study were not physically active out of the IST field. Similar to findings in an investigation conducted by Yu et al., (2004) into women's physical activity participation in Taiwan, time spent studying and working with tutors to get good grades in out of school time in comparison to gaining physical capital though being physically active was of greater value. This was an area of frustration for some of the young women though seldom challenged.

It was evident in the focus group and interviews that the quest for academic capital and resulting devaluing of physical activity had a considerable impact on the perceptions of PE at IST. Jessica explained,

I think most parents in school they don't think it's [PE] important and they don't take it as seriously because they just think, oh even if you get a bad grade in PE it doesn't affect you... like it doesn't matter as much to them. Like if you get a B in PE, and B in Math, they will be more concerned for Math rather than PE. They don't think PE will really help you. Even if you get an A+ no one would really care, like they might just think, oh it doesn't mean anything, like it doesn't mean you are smart or anything.

The PE field's lack of academic capital, in a larger social setting heavily focused on the attainment of academic capital, influenced the young women's perceptions of, and engagement in, this field. The significance of academic capital in this social setting often reduced the perception of importance of PE. On one hand, similar to the findings of Flintoff and Scraton (2001), this resulted in a PE environment absent of academic pressure which the young women perceived as a break from study and as a result allowed them to have fun. However, as academic capital was so influential throughout all social fields in the Taiwanese context, its absence in the field of PE resulted in a devaluing of the subject. This perspective was also evident in the work of Flintoff and Scraton (2001) whose research subjects questioned the purpose of PE as it did not contribute to the process of gaining academic credentials.

### **Health benefits**

During the focus group and interviews physical activity was often justified as important for its ability to contribute to the four young women's general health. General health was perceived by the young women to involve: the avoidance of illness, the relief of stress and weight management. Here I will discuss both the physical and socio-psychological benefits of physical activity valued by the young women.

A motivator to physical activity involvement in the family field was its association with assumed health benefits. Physical activity was perceived to



contribute to the avoidance of illness, as was evident in Renee's comment, "My Dad is constantly trying to exercise for his health because he has a lot of problems. In our family we don't do physical activities for fun, we just mostly do it for health". Regular physical activity was also believed to be necessary for people to get, and stay, 'in shape', as Jessica describes,

My Dad and Mum they try biking every week because they think that they need to, if they don't go out and exercise then they are basically just staying in an office the whole time and that doesn't do them any good so they go biking every weekend, and we have a treadmill at home, so sometimes at night they treadmill to get in shape

The young women's motivations for physical activity, in regards to health benefits, were often similar to those of their parents. In particular, Mya, Renee and Karen often described physical activity to be helpful in achieving and maintaining a 'normal' body weight. Mya calculated the amount of physical activity she needed in relation to the amount and type of food she ate,

I don't eat any junk food or fatty food... so I think as long as you are eating well you actually need like a basic level of 30minutes of physical activity everyday... but then if you start adding unnecessary calories into your diet then you definitely have to consider increasing your activity time.

Renee presented a similar opinion when asked if she thought that people in Taiwan should be more physically active she responded,

Well, I think so. Yes, because a lot of times when I go walking on the street I see really thin looking people in the face, who have like really big bellies... they need to be more physically active to get their weight down to be more healthy.

These types of comments reflected an additional drive to achieve particular physical capital in the form of a desired body shape. This is consistent with the findings of other studies (Burrows, 2008; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Garrett, 2004; Whitehead & Biddle, 2008) which recognise that some young women perceive the benefits of their engagement in physical activity to be related to its ability to contribute to notions of an 'ideal femininity' through weight management.

When discussing motivations specific to PE involvement, the four young women emphasized physical and psychological benefits. These findings were reflected in the narrative 'Three minutes' in which Karen relishes the break from the classroom that PE offered her. Such a perspective evident also in the work of Flintoff and Scraton (2001), was apparent when the young women discussed the value of PE. For example, Mya commented, "students are basically sitting all day and studying and so it is important for them to do physical activity". Karen also explained, "If we didn't have PE people wouldn't do anything really physical because the school focuses pretty much on academics so PE is a way for them to have fun if they are forced to do academics all day long." Another motivational factor associated with the value of PE was its contribution to the relief of stress. This was evident in comments such as Renee's, "If I don't have physical activities then I would be really stressed. I'm the kind of person that if I don't move for three days I'll go crazy and start screaming".

The importance placed on the avoidance of illness, the relief of stress and weight management, reflects certain forms of health capital, which appeared to be highly valued across the social fields of the family, inner-city Taiwan, and the PE class. Findings in this research reflect a significant motivator for physical activity and PE involvement to be its association with the achievement of such health capital. This finding compliments the work of Flintoff and Scraton (2001) who suggest that young women are strongly influenced by discourses of health and well-being and its relationship with physical activity.

### **Domination of boys in PE**

Mixed opinions were raised by the four young women when discussing their PE experiences with the boys. Findings in this study present the PE class as the only space in which the four young women engaged in physical activity with boys. The narrative 'Boys will be boys' reveals some of the frustrations Renee and Mya experienced during PE lessons with the boys. The domination of boys in PE lessons was a significant contributor to Renee and Mya's lack of enjoyment and motivation in class. Renee used to enjoy participating with the boys but expressed her change in opinion, "like most people I would play with guys and I would be good enough to compete with them. But then, after a little while I did

not want to compete with them anymore because they are always laughing. I think that guys, when they are teenagers, they like to humiliate other people". Mya also did not enjoy participating with the boys, "I think they are kind of annoying. It's not like they do anything to me, it's not a burden but I don't feel very free around them and if you do something wrong sometimes they make fun of you". Similar accounts of harassment as a result of young women not displaying physical competence are also evident in studies conducted by Garrett (2004) and Van Daalen (2005).

Mya and Renee believed teachers often contributed to the dominating behaviour of males in PE. The narrative 'Boys will be boys' is based upon their descriptions of unsupportive class environments created by male and female teachers which enabled boys to dominate without question. This finding supports the work of Azzarito and Solomon (2005) who recognize the influence of teacher's encouragement of boys reinforces their often dominant positions in PE classes. In addition, Renee recognised that parental perceptions supporting the notion of dominating males also reinforced boys' behaviours. She described overhearing a conversation between a father and son on a sideline of a soccer game, "I actually heard him [father] say in front of me "oh that's a girl you should go over there and take her place. Why can't you be better than her." In line with the work of Lin (2008), Renee believed this stance to be based upon ingrained historical assumptions of women in this particular social setting, "For a long time men were above women and women didn't do sports, so they still have the old ideas about women and guys".

Karen and Jessica offered different interpretations from Mya and Renee. Karen enjoyed participating with the boys because they motivated her to work hard, "Because it gives you competition and then you might want to try to be as good as them." Her best PE experience involved a lesson in which she was playing a competitive, game with the boys. She explained, "Afterwards I was pretty happy because they [boys] tried pretty hard so it made us try really hard too." Jessica recognised that there were often negative feelings amongst boys in PE to girls participation, "the guys don't like participating with the girls because they feel like the girls make them lose." However, Jessica found this difficult to

deal with in class as she loved to participate and enjoyed playing with the boys because they were “more competitive”.

The difference in perspectives amongst the four young women in this research can be likely attributed to levels of physical capital. Throughout the focus group and interviews Karen and Jessica appeared to be confident athletes, who displayed a high level of physical capital in the PE class and sports field. As a result they had the necessary skills to compete with, and be accepted by the boys. Mya and Renee appeared to be less confident and to hold limited physical capital in the PE class and as a result were often intimidated by the boys.

### **Competition**

The young women in this research described mixed feelings about competition. To some it motivated them to participate as it involved working together with others towards a common goal (see ‘The final minute’). Similar findings acknowledge the positive influence of competitive situations that involve the communal sense of working together in a shared activity (Garrett, 2004; Williams & Bedward, 2002). However, as researchers have found (Garrett, 2004; Hills, 2006; Van Daalen, 2005), the competitive environment which emphasised physical competence and competitive drive also limited opportunities for some of the young women in this study (see ‘A game for animals’). Supporting the work of Garret (2006), Hills (2006) and Van Daalen (2005), such an environment offered little room for the young women’s embodied practices and valuation systems (or habitus). Renee described a situation in which she was frustrated with the shallowness of her team mates, “When you do well they’ll be really, really nice to you and when you do wrong they’ll say, “Why did you do that!” and they’ll start getting really angry and remember that forever”. The negative reaction of Renee’s peers to her failure was possibly a result of her limiting her peer’s achievement of desired competitive capital. Renee referred back to the concept of the ‘Asian mentality’ stemming from family beliefs when she explained reasons for her peers focus on success,

Those people are, I think, people who like to achieve things more than care about the process. It’s just their home background. Like for me, my Dad taught me why the process is important. But I know that some friends

of mine they don't care about the process they just need to have the achievement.

She discussed different perceptions of achievement amongst her peers, describing some who valued the process while the majority valued the end product. This is an example of the transfer of habitus and capital across social fields.

The majority of opportunities for physical activity in the lives of the young women in this research were limited to competitive sports. As other researchers have found (Azzarito & Solomon, 2006; Garrett, 2004; Van Daalen, 2005), findings in this study reflect the dominance of competitive sports in the field of the PE class and the limited extracurricular physical activities offered by the school. As Garrett (2004) describes, "Inherent in a sport based curriculum is a public display of the body and skill in a competitive environment" (p. 234). Similarly, competitive capital was described by the young women in this research as acquiring the ability to be able to be successful in the field of the PE class through presentation of physical competence in competitive team sports.

### **Opportunities for fun and enjoyment**

The opportunity for fun and enjoyment provided by physical activity, especially in PE lessons, was presented as a motivational factor by all of the young women. Consistent with findings previous investigations of young women's enjoyment of physical activity (Azzarito and Solomon, 2006; Garrett 2004), Mya, Jessica, Karen and Renee enjoyed being physically active and socializing with their friends. For example, Renee commented,

Sometimes I get really pumped up and I go running around and get really physical. I had a soccer game... I started running and the ball went from one side to the other and I kept following the ball... it was fun... if you do that your sweat doesn't really feel bad it's just there.

Jessica also described this motivational element of physical activity in PE, "It's fun, you get to play games with your friends".

The value Renee and Karen placed upon fun and enjoyment in physical activity contrasted with the views of their parents. For example, Renee noted these generational differences in relation to her brother and her own motives for

physical activity in comparison with her Father's, "my Dad says it's necessary for health but I think that my brother and I think it's more about fun. If it's not fun we don't want to do it". In contrast, however, Jessica's parents were supportive of her wanting to have fun through her participation on school sports teams,

I think because my Mum was brought up, more like the American style so she doesn't see that academics is everything. She sees that I really do enjoy sports she feels like it is good for me. Like if I really enjoy it I should do it.

Jessica noted the reason for this contrasting parental attitude to be due to her mother being brought up in a more "American style". Similar to the work of McNay (2000) and Hills (2006), Jessica's comments reflect an awareness of her mother's broader upbringing including both Western and Eastern fields, which have in turn influenced her valuation systems.

### ***The young women's negotiation of the world in which they live***

In this research, the young women's understanding of, and experiences in, physical activity and PE were influenced by a diverse range of social and cultural factors. Perceptions of, and value of, specific forms of capital were shown to be the greatest influence on motivating and constraining factors. A focus on academic achievement and traditional Taiwanese assumptions of femininity and physicality underpinned much of the young women's discussions; however, the young women negotiated these social and cultural assumptions in different ways. As I explain in more depth below, young women in this study appeared to employ an array of practices and strategies to negotiate space in each of these fields and navigate the different valuation systems across fields (e.g., family, school, youth culture, sport, PE).

Mya, Jessica, Renee and Karen had to daily negotiate the complexities of multiple fields (e.g., family, local community, international school) and associated influential forms of capital (e.g., cultural, gender, physical, health, academic). Their perceptions of physical activity and consequential experiences in PE presented insight into the variety of ways this negotiation took place. Building upon the work of Azzarito et al., (2006), Hills (2006) and McNay

(2000), as active participants these young women did not always appear to passively accept gender and cultural norms present in and across fields, they also seemed to actively question, and on some occasions, challenge such norms.

### **Acceptance**

A range of gender and cultural assumptions were recognized by the young women in this research as influencing the way they thought about and engaged in physical activity. As discussed in the earlier section on gender appropriate behaviours, females and males were described as embodying opposite roles in the PE class. These findings are consistent with research in the area of dominant expectations of masculinity and femininity (Scruton, 1992; Wright, 1995). For example, Mya perceived male characteristics of high testosterone, and their competitive and less patient nature as ‘naturally’ determined contributors to physical capital which enabled them to have successful experiences in PE. She overlooked their influence on her lack of enjoyment in the PE class. When asked if she felt threatened by the boys in PE class she responded, “A little but, *they don’t do it on purpose*, it’s just I personally feel that way” reflecting her acceptance of their actions as something natural which they couldn’t control (emphasis added). A more traditional approach to the relationship between femininity and physicality appeared to be common in this research. Such findings contrast with Hills (2006) investigation of girl’s understandings of gendered physicality and PE in the United Kingdom. She found that although some girls appeared to adopt a rather traditional approach to the relationship between femininity and physicality, while the majority of girls were engaged in active attempts to reconcile and reflect on the inconsistencies in their experiences in and across social fields. The contrasting findings in my study are likely a result of the more traditional gender roles/norms (e.g., Confucian principles) present in the broader Taiwanese context, and reinforced in social fields of the family and inner-city Taiwan (Liu, 2002; Young, 1991; Yu et al., 2004).

### **Questioning**

Building on the work of Azzarito et al., (2006), Hills (2006), McNay (2000) and Kenway et al., (1994) who emphasized the active participation of their research subjects, the young women in this research did not always accept cultural and gender norms passively. On some occasions they would present an

awareness of particular gender or cultural assumptions in a field and question them. For example, Mya, Renee, Karen and Jessica questioned their parents' 'narrow' perceptions of physical activity. They felt that their parents often limited the value of physical activity to its contribution to health and academic capital. The young women presented a broader perspective of physical activity's value in its contribution to reducing stress, providing a break from the classroom and an opportunity to have fun and enjoyment. This differing perspective is likely a result of the young women's participation in the PE class field which has allowed them to gain a broader view of the value of physical activity.

### **Hiding**

On one occasion Renee, who enjoyed actively participating in physical activity, chose to hide this interest in an effort to avoid conflict in the PE class field. Renee experienced internal 'conflict' in the PE class (weight training unit) due to her questioning of different valuation systems. She questioned assumptions about the appropriateness of muscle for females. She was proud of the physical capital (strength and power) she had gained through her participation in a taekwondo club. However, after reflecting upon her personal negative experiences (teasing boys) as a young woman displaying the widely perceived unacceptable physical trait of a muscular physique, she ended up accepting the assumptions. This is consistent with Deem and Gilroy (1998) who reported that, "A display of female physicality through activities like weight training may thus be perceived not only as a threat to emphasised femininity but also as undermining hegemonic masculinity, which in itself is built on a bedrock of physical strength" (pp. 97-98). Renee attempted to negotiate her way across these fields with minimal conflict by 'hiding' her physicality and athleticism in the PE field where it was not valued and displaying it in the sports field (Taekwondo club) where it was valued. This reflects the work of Hills' (2006), who found that hiding physical activity interests in particular contexts appeared integral to some girls' efforts to present appropriate forms of female physicality.

### **Challenging**

Occasionally the young women would present an awareness of particular gender or cultural assumptions in a field and subtly challenge them. As revealed



in the focus group and interviews with the young women and presented in the narratives above, these young women often value different practices and experiences than their parents, which sometimes causes conflict. Arguably, in their regular crossings of various fields with different valuation systems, the young women sometimes experience conflicting values and norms which in some cases prompt them to question gender or cultural assumptions in other fields. Supporting the work of McNay (2000), such contradictions between habitus and different value systems in, and across, the different social fields these young women engaged in constituted a space where changing perceptions and challenges could occur.

Clashes of values were particularly vivid in the young women's discussion of different forms of capital valued in the family (e.g., academic, cultural) and the constraining affect this had on their involvement in physical activity. The narrative 'The announcement' presented such a clash between Renee and her parents regarding her involvement in a breakdancing club. This clash resulted in Renee verbally challenging her parents' views. Another example of a clash of values between the young women and their male peers was evident in the narrative 'Boys will be boys'. This presented Renee's frustrations with her peers' acceptance of gender behaviours in the PE class. Her awareness of the affect these assumptions had on her involvement resulted in her choosing to physically challenge these assumptions by taking a more dominant (male like) role in the PE class (e.g., shooting a goal instead of passing the ball).

Jessica expressed similar frustration with her peers' seemingly passive acceptance of gender norms and rules regarding female participation in the PE class field. She recognised that many females had limited engagement in PE as they did not value the subject. It was not important for them to acquire physical capital as it was not perceived as valuable for them in comparison to their male peers. Jessica challenged such assumptions by distancing herself from the widely accepted habitus contributing to gender capital in the PE field through her 'male like' active involvement in PE class. Jessica also experienced a clash of values in the local community. The narrative 'The search for shoes' is based upon a difficulty she faced as a physically active female in Taiwan trying to find female

sports shoes. Through this experience she recognised the unfair stereotypical gender assumptions present in her local community and in Taiwanese society more broadly. She chose to challenge such assumptions by questioning the shop assistant, asking, why they did not cater for young women. She then recognized that the challenge was not going to get what she needed. Fighting society was too big so she opted to find another way to get what she wanted. Jessica had been selected for a varsity sports team every season since her freshman year. Supporting the work of Hills (2006) and McNay (2000), Jessica's challenge of traditional gender roles can be linked to her attainment and value of various forms of physical capital in the sports team field which clashed with the habitus of the PE class and local community fields, resulting in her reflexivity. Jessica's actions supports Hills (2006) work which found that in individual's challenges to unfair components of social fields lies the potential for agency. This apparent gender reflexivity possibly stemmed from the exposure Jessica had to a different set of gender relations in her family, at IST, in the PE classroom and also exposure to global media such as internet, films, and magazines which show different ways of being a female, different gender relations, and different ways of being a physically active woman.

Jessica, Karen and Renee often accepted and occasionally challenged dominant perceptions of gendered and cultural assumptions regarding physical activity in an across all fields. Their awareness of inequities was likely a result of their broader experience of gender and physical activity in their daily lives. Hanson (2005) suggested, "Positive influences on young Asian American women's attitudes toward non-traditional activity may come from the large presence and success of their mothers in the labour force" (p. 304). Likewise, the young women in this research have been encouraged to imagine a different future (e.g. higher education, high wage earning careers), and thus, are sometimes able to see and critique (some of) the inequities in various spaces in the broader community field. Opportunities for the young women to overtly resist inequities were limited. However, several of the young women engaged in small, everyday struggles, which did not necessarily cause major social change, but allowed them to move across fields and participate in activities they enjoyed.

The findings in this study suggest that the young women negotiated valuation systems in different ways in different fields. There were several examples present in the findings of this research of young women's agency in this context through their reflexivity of such valuation systems in particular fields and their attempts to negotiate or subtly resist valuation systems via their everyday practices.

### ***Summary***

This chapter outlined the findings associated with the influence of socio-cultural contextual factors on young women's understandings of physical activity and the affect this had on their experiences in PE. It indicates that various forms of capital, in and across social fields, have served to both encourage and limit the young women's engagement in physical activity. Academic capital in particular, was highly valued across all social fields, except the sports field and PE field. It involved the importance placed on achieving good grades in academic subjects and on preparation for a successful career. This focus on academic capital often limited the young women's participation in physical activity. Although the presence of health capital empowered engagement in physical activity, the presence of academic capital often overruled this as it was perceived as significantly more important in this social setting. Physical capital, in the form of dominant traditional Taiwanese cultural and gendered expectations, was also an influential element evident in all social fields, including the PE class and sports field; however, physical capital, in the form of physical competence and competitive drive was generally isolated to the sports team and the PE class fields. As a result, physical activity held varying degrees of value in the lives of the young women in this research. It was evident in the findings that the four young women negotiated various forms of capital and associated valuation systems in and across fields by their acceptance, questioning, hiding and occasional challenging of associated gender and cultural assumptions. In the following conclusion I consider the implications these findings have for creating positive and relevant PE experiences, not only in my personal teaching practice, but also that of other people working with young third culture women in physical activity and PE settings.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this chapter I summarise the main research findings of this study and discuss their implications for practice in regards to creating positive learning experiences for young ‘third culture’ (Pollock and Van Reken, 2001) women in PE.

The purpose of this research was to examine young women’s understandings of physical activity and how these understandings affect their own experiences in PE within the context of an international high school in Taiwan. The following questions were formulated to guide my investigation:

1. How do socio-cultural contextual factors influence how young women living in Taiwan understand and experience physical activity?
2. How do these factors shape female student’s experiences of PE?

A focus group and individual in-depth interviews were conducted with four young women in order to address these questions. Data gathered was presented in the form of seven narratives which provided rich descriptions whilst Bourdieu’s theoretical schema was used to analyse key themes.

Findings in this study suggest that the young women’s understanding of physical activity appeared to be influenced by various forms of health capital, physical capital and academic capital. To the young women in this study, physical activity was often valued for its assumed contribution to health capital (e.g., weight management, avoidance of illness) and as such, motivated their involvement in physical activity. Physical activity was also presented by the young women as an activity which often reinforced particular forms of physical capital (e.g., appropriate femininities and masculinities). Such capital privileged males and often limited female involvement. The value of academic capital (e.g., academic achievement), presented across all social fields, seemed to have the greatest impact on the young women’s understanding of, and subsequent engagement in physical activity. Physical activity was perceived as having significantly less value than academic achievement in the lives of the young women. As a result the young women’s involvement in physical activity was often limited.

The way in which the young women understood physical activity influenced their experiences in physical activity and, of particular interest to this study, their experiences in PE. Although the young women's value of health, physical, and academic capital were evident in their discussions of physical activity and PE experiences, the young women negotiated these forms of capital in different ways in different fields. Some of the young women (e.g. Mya, Karen) chose to accept and embody traditional Taiwanese assumptions of appropriate forms of physicality (e.g., less physical participation in the PE class). Some young women avoided or hid inappropriate physicality in order to present appropriate femininity (e.g. Renee lowering the weight she was lifting in a PE class). However, occasionally the young women (e.g., Jessica, Renee) who had experienced achievement of, and thus, valued, physical capital in the sports field and occasionally the PE class field, recognised forms of regulation in the local community and their family. They were empowered to question and in some situations, challenge gender assumptions (e.g. active participation in PE). Arguably, this was the result of a clash of habitus between the sports team/PE class field and that of other fields they passed through (e.g., family, local community). Without recognising it, however, all the young women simultaneously continued to also accept some of these regulations (e.g. dutiful and respectful daughter in the family, good student at school, passive female in the community). This acceptance reflected the deeply ingrained perceived importance of such forms of gender, physical, health and academic capital in their lives.

In order to work towards creating positive and meaningful experiences in PE for young third culture women, three implications for practice can be drawn from the findings of this study. In order to help young women negotiate the habitus and capital of particular fields and in turn enhance their involvement in PE, educators need to:

1. Consider the influence of the broader social setting on students in their classes
2. Disrupt/challenge gender stereotypes
3. Be reflexive of their own gendered and cultural assumptions

In regards to the first implication for practice, findings in this study suggest that an increased awareness of the cultural complexities of students' lives may help teachers to gain insight into the multiple understandings of physical activity which influence student experiences in PE. Consequently, when teachers deliberate over a students' lack of motivation, or enjoyment in particular activities in a PE class, further consideration of the broader social setting in which their students live could provide possible reasons for varying forms of engagement. As was apparent in my findings, it is important for PE teachers to recognise that the value placed upon physical capital in the fields of the sports team and the PE class can often be in conflict with forms of capital in other fields which students spend the majority of their time. For example, in this study, physical competence and a competitive drive were desired forms of physical capital in the field of the PE class. However, these desirable abilities and behaviours were often in conflict with the physical capital of the family and local community fields which seemed to value traditional Taiwanese assumptions of gender appropriate behaviours stemming from Confucian principles of ideal female behaviour (e.g., docile, gentle and quiet).

The second implication involves the need for teachers of third culture females, to develop an awareness of the presence of gender assumptions in their PE classes and the broader social setting and the affect the gender assumptions have on young women's engagement in PE. Furthermore, opportunities need to be provided which challenge dominant stereotypes in order to help young women renegotiate their participation. Teachers could implement such a strategy, through everyday interactions with students, in the form of critical conversations, in an effort to develop awareness about the influence of gender assumptions present in their classes. PE programmes could also act to challenge traditional ideals of femininity and physicality by offering students a wider variety of physical activities aside from competitive sports alone. With regard to PE at IST, this study recognises that there is a dominant competitive environment in PE classes which often privileges young men and limits young women. As such, the current capital of PE classes at IST needs to be questioned as there are other elements of value in PE and physical activity which are often over looked (e.g., the joy of

movement for movement's sake, individual achievement, personal fitness). Given this, young women at IST could benefit from being offered activities which are not focused solely on competition. Activities such as adventure education, physical challenges, dance, problem solving, yoga or modified games would give young women a variety of physical activities to choose from which may allow them to feel more comfortable in PE so that they may more easily learn, experience success, and feel confident in their bodies.

The final implication involves the need for teachers to be reflexive of their own gender and cultural assumptions about active bodies (*habitus*) and the affect such assumptions may have on their teaching practice. Throughout the course of this research I have not only become aware of the significant influence of the broader social setting on my students' lives as well as their engagement in my lessons, but I have also become increasingly aware of the influence of my own gender and cultural assumptions as a white, Western, young, heterosexual, married, physically active, PE teacher from New Zealand. When I first began teaching at IST four years ago, the diversity of engagement in the PE class and the lack of value given to physical activity intrigued, and on some occasions frustrated me. As a physically active woman brought up in a physically active family I found it often difficult to comprehend why many of my students placed such little value on physical activity. The process of crossing fields (e.g. teaching in New Zealand and Taiwan, being a young woman in two different cultures, the roles of teacher and researcher) has helped me increase my pedagogical reflexivity. As Hills (2006) and McNay (2000) argue, when individuals travel across multiple fields with divergent norms, some experience new ways of perceiving the world. This research has encouraged me to be reflexive of my assumptions about health, physicality and the value of physical activity and PE which are ingrained in my *habitus* and the impact this has on my teaching practice. Potential future research could expand on this work to investigate ways in which teachers from other 'fields' (e.g., New Zealand, America) make sense of the different values and desired capital in new fields (e.g., Taiwan) which their students often take for granted because their values have been firmly embodied in their *habitus* from a very young age and continually reinforced by the society in which they live.

This study has highlighted the influence of different cultural contexts and the ways in which they can act to influence or shape young women's understandings of gender, physicality, physical activity, PE, and their own bodies. This study has also demonstrated the ways in which young women living in a multicultural society can act to negotiate various cultural and gender norms and expectations in their everyday lives. Although the social setting of this research, within an international school in Taiwan is unique, insights gained from this research present issues of femininity and physicality which, in many ways, are relevant to all physical educators working with young women.



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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix One:*

#### **PRINCIPAL AND HEAD OF DEPARTMENT INFORMATION SHEET**

Dear (Name),

I am currently carrying out a thesis research as part of a Masters in Sport and Leisure Studies through the University of Waikato (New Zealand). I am writing to ask for your permission to conduct this research in your school. Many of our students have to daily negotiate the challenges of living in an Asian society and being educated in an American school. It is difficult to know how and to what extent the many social, historical, cultural, political and economic factors influence young women's understandings of their bodies, health and fitness, which can come to the fore in the Physical Education (PE) setting. Thus in this project I seek to gain a better understanding of young women's lived experiences by engaging in focus groups and in-depth interviews with some of our Grade 10 female students.

All of the female students in Grade 10 will receive an email containing a brief outline of my research and a request for any interested participants (refer to appendix H). If a student appears interested in being involved they will attend an information session at which they will receive a formal introductory letter (refer to appendix C) which provides information about the project, research process, and the ethical rights of the research participants. Also included will be a consent form (refer to appendix D). Parents/Caregivers will also receive an information letter and consent form (refer to appendix E & F).

I plan to have 9 students involved as participants. They will be divided (randomly) into 3 groups of 3 for small focus groups (45-60 minutes). The aim of these small focus groups is to have the students discuss general aspects of the research focus in order for me to develop a broader understanding of issues relevant to the students associated with physical activity and PE in their lives. This increased understanding will guide the development of more focused questions for the following in-depth interviews (45-60 minutes). 3-4 of the initial 9 participants will be selected to complete the in-depth individual interviews. Focus groups and in-depth interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the student and no class time will be missed. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. Students will be provided with the transcribed interviews to verify their accuracy. Each participant will be given full disclosure about the nature and conduct of the research and interviews. I have attached draft letters to potential participants and their parents/guardians explaining the key aspects of the nature, process and ethics associated with the project.

All aspects of this research are voluntary. No pressure will be placed on individuals who choose to abstain from participating in the research. Participants and the school in the research will not be identified in any way. All research data

will be stored securely and participant and school pseudonyms will be used in all written material. You will receive a summary report of the research via email on its completion.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this research, please contact myself or my primary supervisor: Dr. Holly Thorpe: +64 7 8384466 ext. 6528 (+ 4 hours from Taiwan) or email

[hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz)

If you agree to my carrying out this research in the Upper School, please sign below and return the form to me by .

Regards,

Melissa Thomas

At work: [thomasm@tas.edu.tw](mailto:thomasm@tas.edu.tw)

At home: 2875 6092

## ***Appendix Two:***

### **PRINCIPAL'S CONCENT FORM**

**Name of research:** Understanding the experiences of female students in an International school in Taiwan.

**Name of principal researcher:** Melissa Thomas

- I have received an information sheet about the aims of this research and have had a chance to ask any questions and discuss this research with Melissa. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that the identity of this institution will be kept confidential throughout this research.

I give permission for this research to be undertaken in this institution under the conditions set out on the information sheet.

**Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

## ***Appendix Three:***

### **INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

Dear (name),

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my research study focusing on female experiences in Physical Education (PE). This letter is a follow-up to the information you received via email. I would like to formally invite you to become an interview participant in this research. The title of my research is: Understanding the Physical Experiences of female students in an International school in Taiwan.

#### **The study**

I am interested in talking to you about your experiences in physical activity and PE. I am aware that limitations are often present, for females in particular, in many physical activity and educational settings. However, there are many factors, both positive and negative, which may influence your understanding of and experiences in PE which I may not consider as I have not grown up in the same country, time period, or attended the same school as you. I am interested in talking to you about your experiences in physical activity and PE to be able to develop a better understanding of these influences.

#### **Your involvement**

If you agree to take part in the research you will be required to be involved in one focus group discussion with two other students and possibly one individual interview (each approximately 45-60mins in length). I will limit the individual interviews to 3-4 students so you may not be required to be involved in this.

If you agree to take part in this research you have the right to withdraw from involvement in this study at any time prior to or during the focus group discussion. It is understood that you have up until two days after the completion of the focus group/interview to withdraw from the project if you wish. You may also decline to participate in particular aspects of the research if you wish.

#### **Use of the information collected**

Data and data analysis will be used to meet the aims and objectives of the research as outlined above and to answer the research questions of my thesis submission. The findings may also be used for other articles, papers and conference presentations. You will receive a summary report of the research via email on its completion.

#### **Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential throughout this research. You will not be identified by name in any written material. I do not envisage that your involvement in this research will cause any undue stress or concern. However, if you are concerned about aspects of this research I would encourage you to, firstly talk to myself; or secondly, you may contact Dr. Richard Hartzell, the Upper School Principal or my primary research supervisor Dr. Holly Thorpe: +64 7 8384466 ext. 6528 (+ 4 hours from Taiwan) or email [hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz)

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to ask further questions about your potential involvement in this research. You can find me in my office or email me at [thomasm@tas.edu.tw](mailto:thomasm@tas.edu.tw)

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign the following consent form and return the form to me by (date).

Regards,

Melissa Thomas

At work: [thomasm@tas.edu.tw](mailto:thomasm@tas.edu.tw)

At home: 2875 6092

## ***Appendix Four:***

### **PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM**

**Name of research:** Understanding the experiences of female students in an International school in Taiwan.

**Name of principal researcher:** Melissa Thomas

- I have received an information sheet about the aims of this research and on my rights as a research participant.
- I have had a chance to ask any questions and discuss my participation with Melissa Thomas. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my identity will be kept confidential throughout this research.
- I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time up until two days after the focus group/interview. I understand that I may decline to participate in particular aspects of the research, if I wish.
- I understand that I will receive a summary report of the research via email on its completion.

I agree to participate in this research under the conditions set out on the information sheet.

**Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

## ***Appendix Five:***

### **PARENT INFORMATION SHEET**

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

I am currently completing a research required for the fulfilment of my Masters of Sport and Leisure Studies through the University of Waikato. I am investigating the Physical Education (PE) experiences of female students at T.A.S.

#### **The study**

I am interested in talking to Grade 10 female students about their experiences in physical activity and PE. I am aware that limitations are often present, for females in particular, in many physical activity and educational settings. However, there are many factors, both positive and negative, which may influence their understanding of and experiences in PE which I may not consider as I have not grown up in the same country, time period, or attended the same school. I am interested in talking to Grade 10 female students about their experiences in physical activity and PE to be able to develop a better understanding of these influences.

#### **Your daughter's involvement**

I am seeking consent for your daughter to participate in one focus group discussion with two other students and possibly one individual interview (each approximately 45-60mins in length). I will limit the individual interviews to 3-4 students so your daughter may not be required to be involved in the individual interview. These focus group/interviews will be conducted at the convenience of the students and no class time will be missed. I have attached an interview guide which will provide an overall direction to the interviews. With your permission I would like to tape record the focus group/interview so I can correctly record what is said. Your daughter will be provided with the transcribed focus group/interview to verify its accuracy.

Your daughter is not obliged to participate in the research and may withdraw at anytime up until two days after the focus group has been conducted. She may also decline to participate in particular aspects of the research if she wishes. Should you consent to your daughter's involvement in this project, you may withdraw your consent at any time up until two days after the focus group has been conducted. You may withdraw your consent by contacting me at school or home.

#### **Use of the information collected**

Data and data analysis will be used to meet the aims and objectives of the research as outlined above and to answer the research questions of my thesis submission. The findings may also be used for other articles, papers and conference presentations. You and your daughter will receive a summary report of the research via email on its completion.

#### **Confidentiality**

Your daughter will not be identified in any way. All research data will be stored securely in my home office and pseudonyms will be used in all written material.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this research, please contact myself or my primary research supervisor Dr. Holly Thorpe: +64 7 8384466 ext. 6528 (+ 4 hours from Taiwan) or email [hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz)

If you consent to your daughter's participation in this research, please sign the following consent form and return the form to me by (date).



Kind regards,

Melissa Thomas

At work: [thomasm@tas.edu.tw](mailto:thomasm@tas.edu.tw)

At home: 2875 6092

## ***Appendix Six:***

### **PARENT'S CONSENT FORM**

**Name of research:** Understanding the experiences of female students in an International school in Taiwan.

**Name of principal researcher:** Melissa Thomas

- I have received an information sheet about the aims of this research and on my rights regarding the involvement of my daughter.
- I have had a chance to ask any questions and discuss my daughter's participation with Melissa Thomas. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my daughter's identity will be kept confidential throughout this research.
- I understand that my daughter may withdraw from this research at any time up until two days after the focus group has been conducted. I understand that my daughter may decline to participate in particular aspects of the research, if she wishes.

I consent to my daughter's involvement in this research under the conditions set out on the information sheet.

**Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

## ***Appendix Seven:***

### **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

What physical activities do you participate in outside school hours?  
Why do you participate in these activities?  
What do you enjoy about these activities?  
Is there anything you don't like about these activities?  
What do 'others' (e.g. Parents, peers) think about you participating in these activities?  
Do you think there are any pressures on young people living in Taiwan to be physically active?  
If so, what are these pressures and where do they come from?  
Do you think that there are any pressures on young women living in Taiwan to be physically active?  
If so, what are these pressures and where do they come from?  
What sort of physical activities do you think you will participate in once you leave high school?  
Why do you think you will participate in these activities?  
Are the physical activities you participate in different to those engaged in by your mother (or parents)? Why do you think this is?  
Are the physical activities you participate in different to those engaged in by your grandmother (or grandparents)? Why do you think this is?  
What sports or physical activity do you participate in during school hours?  
Why do you participate in these activities?  
What do you enjoy about these activities?  
Is there anything you don't like about these activities?  
What is the main difference between your experiences in physical activity outside of school and PE?  
What do you enjoy about PE?  
Is there anything you don't like about PE?  
Have your perceptions of PE changed over the years? If so, how and why?  
Do you think there are any pressures on young people in Taiwan to be physically inactive?  
Do you think there are any pressures on young women in Taiwan to be physically inactive?

## ***Appendix Eight:***

### **EMAIL TO FEMALE STUDENTS IN GRADE 10**

Hi,

I am currently completing a research study focusing on female experiences in Physical Education (PE). I am interested in talking to Grade 10 female students about their experiences in PE at our school.

There are many factors, both positive and negative, which may influence your understanding of and experiences in PE which I may not consider as I have not grown up in the same country, time period, or attended the same school as you. I am interested in talking to you about your experiences in physical activity and PE to be able to develop a better understanding of these influences. I am interested in hearing a range of perspectives from students who enjoy PE to students who dislike PE. If you would like to participate in this study you would be required to complete one group discussion with two other students and possibly one individual interview.

If you are interested in talking to me about your experiences in PE please respond to this email. I will meet with all interested participants during flex period (3:00-3:30) on (date) to provide you with a more detailed outline of what would be required of you if you were to participate.

Thanks,

Melissa Thomas

[thomasm@tas.edu.tw](mailto:thomasm@tas.edu.tw)

## ***Appendix Nine:***

### **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### ***Introductory questions:***

How long have you been at TAS for? What school did you attend before this one? What was it like?

Where were you born? Where are your parents from? What passport do you hold? What nationality would you label yourself as and why? What language do you speak at home?

#### ***Main questions to everyone:***

Could you tell me a bit about your experiences in PA at school? What do you like? Are there any aspects you don't like very much?

What physical activities do you do outside the school?

Do you remember when and why you started doing this activity?

What did your parents think of you doing this activity?

What do you like about this activity?

Are there any aspects about this activity that make it difficult or not very fun to participate in? Are your family/friends supportive of your participation in this activity? If so, how do they support you? If not, why do you think this might be? How do you react/respond to this?

Why do you not participate in any PA outside the school?

In the focus group we talked about the physical activity participation in Taiwan. Why do you think some people don't really participate very often? Can you give me any examples of people you know who don't participate and maybe tell me a little bit about why they don't participate?

Do you think people in Taiwan should be more physically active? If so, why do you think they should be?

What physical activities do your family members do? Why do they do these activities? How do you feel about these activities?

What physical activities do your female friends do? Why do they do these activities? How do you feel about these activities?

What physical activities do your male friends (or brothers) do? Why do they do these activities? How do you feel about these activities?

Do you think there are differences in what physical activities girls can/should do and what boys should do?

What physical activities are better suited to girls?

What physical activities are better suited to boys?

What value do you think PA has in your family? Why do you think this is?

Do you think people at school think PA is important? What makes you think this? Are there any exceptions?

How important is physical activity in your life right now? How important do you think PA activity will be in your life in five years? How important do you think PA will be in your life in 10 years? Why might the role of PA in your life change? What value do you think PA has personally in your life? Why do you think this is?

Why do you think we do PE at this school? Do you think people respect PE at this school? What makes you think this way? Can you think of any examples?

What have you gained from your experiences in PE at this school?

Describe what type of PE student you think you presently are? Has this changed over time? Why? How does this compare to other students in the class? Why do you think there are differences?

***Individual questions:***

- Jessica: You said in the focus group that you enjoyed PE because it was a break from sitting in the classroom – is there anything else about PE that makes it enjoyable for you?

What do you dislike about PE? Why?

You are involved in Varsity Cross country, Touch Rugby and Track and Field, how has involvement in these activities influenced you personally? (What have you got out of it?) Why did you decide to get involved in these activities? What does your family think about your participation in these sports? What do your female friends think about your participations in these sports? What do your male friends think about your participation in these sports?

- Mya: You said in the focus group that you thought that PE was a waste of time towards the end of high school – Does this mean that you thought it was more valuable when you were younger? What changed as you got older? Why?

Is there anything you enjoy about PE presently? What would make it more enjoyable for you? Why?

- Karen: What aspects of PE do you find enjoyable? Why?

In the focus group discussion you mentioned that you disliked having to participate in certain activities in PE and that you would like to have more choice – If you had more choice in PE what would you choose to do? Why?

You are involved in JV Basketball, how has involvement in this activity influenced you personally? (What have you got out of it?) Why did you decide to get involved in this activity? What does your family think about your participation in these sports? What do your female friends think about your participations in these sports? What do your male friends think about your participation in these sports?

- Renee: You said in the focus group that you enjoyed PE because you got to be with friends - is there anything else about PE that makes it enjoyable for you?

In the focus group discussion you mentioned that you did not like it in PE when some of the more highly skilled students would not treat other students very nicely – What do you think makes people act this way? Do you think that there is a way to solve this problem?

You are involved in Taekwondo, how has involvement in this activity influenced you personally? (What have you got out of it?) Why did you decide to get involved in this activity? What does your family think about your participation in these sports? What do your female friends think about your participations in these sports? What do your male friends think about your participation in these sports?

***Main Questions to everyone:***

Think back over your experiences of PE at this school. Do you think that males and females would have the same experiences?

How do boys participate in PE? How do girls participate in PE? Why do you think they participate differently?

Are there any girls that participate more like boys? If so, how/why/where/when/who? What do people think of these girls?

Are there any boys that participate 'like girls'? If so, how/why/where/when/who? What do people think of these boys?

Do you enjoy participating in PE with boys?

Are there certain physical activities that you think of as only male or female activities?

Tell me a story about the best PE lesson you have had (*Expand when necessary*)

Tell me a story about the worst PE lesson you have had (*Expand when necessary*)

*Appendix Ten:*

**PROMPTING IMAGES**



Figure 2.0 – A muscular Asian young woman  
(Retrieved February 05, 2008, from  
<http://images.google.com/>)



Figure 2.1 – A slim Asian young female model  
(Retrieved February 05, 2008, from  
<http://images.google.com/>)



Figure 2.2 – A muscular  
Western young woman  
(Retrieved February 05,  
2008, from  
<http://images.google.com/>)





Figure 2.3 – A slim Western young female model  
(Retrieved February 05, 2008, from  
<http://images.google.com/>)

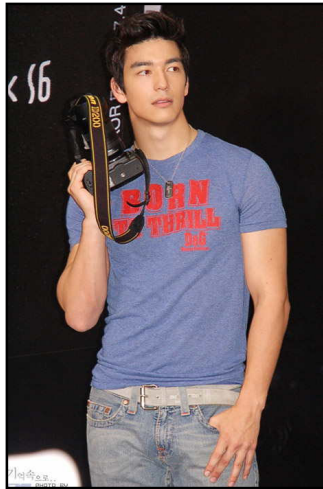


Figure 2.4 – A muscular Asian young man  
(Retrieved February 05, 2008, from  
<http://images.google.com/>)



Figure 2.5 – A thin Western young man  
(Retrieved February 05, 2008, from  
<http://images.google.com/>)