

Self-Image and Physical Education – A Phenomenological Study

Renée Perrin-Wallqvist and Eva Segolsson Carlsson
Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sverige, Sweden

In this study our aim was to investigate (a) how the awareness of one's self-image reveals itself as a phenomenon, and (b) if self-image is influenced by physical education in a social context with teachers and pupils. Six pupils, aged 15 and 16 years, attending compulsory school were interviewed with the use of an empirical phenomenological psychological method. The Empirical Phenomenological Psychological (EPP) analysis of the interviews resulted in two main themes in terms of self-concepts: self-image as self-contemplation and the factors of influence upon a pupil's self-image in physical education each with three subthemes. We end with a discussion about the different aspects on the noetic and the noematic perspectives on self-image and self-contemplation. Key Words: Phenomenology, Physical Education, Self-Image, Self-Contemplation, Verbal, and Non-Verbal Communication

Background

Throughout life, we seek the answer to the question “Who am I?” and this question is particularly in focus during our development as teenagers. During this time, major physiological and psychological changes occur and adolescence constitutes the sum of all our attempts to adjust and incorporate these external and internal changes within the self (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1977). In this context, the body is essential to experiencing ourselves. It acts as a symbol of the self and is also of significance in furthering the individual's identity (Sparkes, 1997). When the body changes and develops, the identity also undergoes upheaval. The development of the self-identity can either be seen as a process entirely ongoing within the individual in a way that is described in classical psychoanalysis or as a process occurring in concert with the social environment (Ahlgren, 1991; Harter, 1996, 1999; Oyserman & Marcus, 1998; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974).

There are many homonymous and synonymous terms for self-concepts both in the Swedish and English language literature. Self-concept, self-esteem, self-perception, self-confidence, self-image, self-awareness, self-evaluation, self-worth, and self-consciousness are some examples of English expressions. Self-concept has been defined as an umbrella term for the attributes of the self and self-esteem as an evaluative and developing component according to Lindwall (2004), while other researchers use the terms synonymously (Lintunen, 1999; Sonstroem, 1997). According to Moser (2006), this makes it difficult to unambiguously define both the Swedish and the English self-concept. On the other hand, there is a certain amount of consensus regarding how the significance and constitution of self-concept arises, namely from how we assess ourselves as people and how others look at and assess us (Bean & Lipka, 1984; Brissett, 1972; Rosenberg, 1979; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007).

The self and its relationship with other factors are often described in models and structures. Fox (1988, 1997), Rosenberg (1979), and Shavelson (2003) are of the opinion that the self is constituted in multidimensional and hierarchical structures whose objects have a global and a general significance. According to Fox (1997), self-esteem as a global phenomenon has a subcategory, Physical Self, which with regard to sporting ability consists of an attractive body, physical strength, and fitness. Shavelson, like Marsh, Craven and McInerney (2003), identifies self-concept as a global object with underlying categories of social relationships, academic ability, or physical and health-related proficiency. Sonstroem (1997) describes an alternative model in which participation in physical activity yields psychological advantages in terms of self-esteem and in which physical expertise spans external exercise and internal self-esteem.

Hattie's (2003) critique of the application of various models, in accordance with the above, is "that these conceptions are 'there' with no reference to time and place" (p. 142). These terms are neither genetically nor environmentally conditioned, according to Hattie, who continues by criticising the traditional testing methods of the self as an assessment of everything we choose to interpret about the ego. This critique can be related to Giorgi (1986) who holds this opinion "...that is, how things and events are for the consciousness that beholds them and not how they are in themselves" (p. 6). Thus, psychological objects of study could appropriately be studied using phenomenology, a discipline seeking knowledge about the significance of different experiences rather than pure facts surrounding the experience (Giorgi).

In this study, the focus is on how instruction in Physical Education (PE) affects pupils' self-image and what self-image means to pupils. Phenomenological principles are used to study what these effects mean in terms of how pupils assess themselves and how others look at them. The assessed as a phenomenon is what Sokolowski (2000) calls noema, while the intentional act which constitutes noema is called noesis. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to understand the meaning and essence of the awareness of one's self-image, as perceived by pupils in physical education classes in Sweden.

The Self in Physical Education

Influencing the development of a positive self is one of the goals of the overall PE syllabus in Europe. According to van Assche, Vanden Auweele, Metlushko, and Rzewnicki (1999), there are four predominant, shared goals for curricula/syllabus in Physical Education in European countries: fitness/health/safety, psychomotor competence, positive self-perception, and social development. Craven, Marsh, and Burnett (2003), and Ommundsen and Bar-Eli, (1999) have emphasized the significance of self-concept/self-esteem for the psychological development of positive relationships, health, and motivation. The Swedish PE syllabus also includes the goal that pupils must develop their physical, mental and social ability and develop a positive self-image (Skolverket, 2006). This goal must be regarded as important, as it is obligatory and encompasses all children and adolescents between the ages of seven and 16, though research indicates negative consequences, according to Branden (1994); Harter (1996, 1999), and Whitehead and Corbin, (1997), if the goals are not achieved. To be able to achieve the goal of developing their pupils' positive self-image, teachers must know the meaning of the word (Whitehead & Corbin).

Most research on the self relative to Physical Education is quantitative. This research has shown that definitions of self-concept are vague and ambiguous and this, together with insufficient knowledge of terms, has led to unclear instruction about the self (Goodwin, 1999). In order to enhance pupils' selves, teachers must know those factors that may contribute to a positive self-image. Communication skills among the teachers are, for instance, significant to the development of the self (Bengtsson, 2001; Coakley, 1997; Morgan & Welton, 1992). At the same time, teachers are criticised for not understanding the role of communication in the positive development of self-esteem (Ommundsen & Bar-Eli, 1999). In one of few PE studies conducted in Sweden, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's theory (2002) about body awareness, Swartling-Widerström (2005) has focused upon how this awareness is reflected and handled in the syllabus of PE education.

In the Swedish Agency for Education's national assessment of PE, certain questions focused on self-evaluation. In response to these questions, teachers and pupils (16 to 18 years old) held different perceptions of what contributed towards a positive self-image. Teachers were of the opinion that the most important aim in PE was for their pupils to develop a positive relationship towards their own bodies, a view they thought was in line with the curriculum. But this opinion was restricted to the physical body. Pupils felt that a positive self-image also pertained to self-confidence and that PE had not contributed towards this according to an assessment made by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2003). The views of the pupils differed depending upon gender. Male pupils thought that PE had contributed to their positive self-image while 10% of the female pupils thought that PE had contributed to the development of a worse self-image.

The pupils' answers suggest that PE affects both body and soul. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's (2002) phenomenological philosophy concerning the significance of the body in humanities' understanding of their existential situation has been chosen as a theoretical basis for this study. According to Merleau-Ponty, a human motor skill is our primary intentionality as our understanding of movements is body-centred. Merleau-Ponty means that a movement is not a thought of a movement but as a practical possibility for our body. This means that our consciousness and thinking about body movement does not concern "I'm thinking of", but rather a body-centred "I can" (p. 159). Experience exists in the body and contributes towards body and soul being inseparable in terms of the ego (Duesund, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1999). Merleau-Ponty (2002) calls this relationship "the lived body or the phenomenal body" (p. 121) which means that my world exists through my body or, as he has expressed it, we *are* our bodies and do not just *have our* bodies. It is specifically the awareness of one's self-image, in accordance with how we *are* our bodies in PE that is the focus of this study as well as how this reveals itself as a phenomenon for pupils.

The phenomenological perspective is different from the idea that Bean and Lipka (1984), Fox (1988, 1997), and Shavelson (2003) suggest when they purport that the self-concept is constituted. In phenomenology, the self is represented by one concept and used in one dimension. For Bean and Lipka and Shavelson (2003) self-perception consists of two concepts: self-concept and self-esteem, ideas that are hierarchical and multidimensional. Fox, (1988, 1997) and Lindwall (2004) also divide the concept into a part that is value-neutral and another part often evaluative, also known as self-esteem.

Such a split of the concept is slightly alien in a phenomenological sense. This is because the transcendental self, according to phenomenology, is not value-neutral as this also evaluates itself while simultaneously appearing in a context and revealing itself to someone.

According to Sokolowski (2000), studies of understanding – in this case understanding the self-concept – should not be divided into components as they are in the previously mentioned hierarchical models. The significant part of something cannot stand alone, be investigated, or be presented as a part, separated from the whole to which it belongs. Rather, the reconstituted whole should be analyzed.

Kerry and Armour (2000) are of the opinion that phenomenological research into sports has been limited in terms of the number of studies published and these studies have based their references on second-hand sources. They suggest that the ontological and epistemological prerequisites have not been dealt with in the method. There are only a handful of researchers, according to Kerry and Armour, whose studies have a high level of phenomenological quality methodologically speaking. They refer in their report to Smith's study of Physical Education from a life world perspective. As the question of self-image both concerns what people feel in their life worlds, and how this phenomenon presents itself for them there, and in this case for pupils in PE, our efforts are to accept the challenge to conduct a study of high quality according this perspective.

Therefore, the purposes of the present study are to understand the meaning and essence of awareness of one's self-image, as perceived by pupils of physical education classes in Sweden, and how this knowledge will serve as a basis for further studies with the purpose of improving teaching in PE in terms of the concept of self-image.

Researcher Context

Eva Segolsson Carlsson is a lecturer in Physical Education and she educates PE teachers in the teacher education program at Karlstad University. She is also a PhD-student in psychology. Her area of interest in research is the relationship between self-image and physical education.

Renée Perrin-Wallqvist, PhD, is an assistant professor of psychology at Karlstad University. She is also a registered psychologist with a professional background in educational psychology. She has been working as a school psychologist with pupils from six to 19 years of age. Her specific research interest is fire prevention and arson in childhood and adolescence. Her major focus lies in the field of developmental psychology where the self, self-image, and the self-concept play a major role. She has supervised Ms. Segolsson Carlsson during this study and will continue as her supervisor throughout her PhD studies.

Method

Data Collection

The paradigm chosen is qualitative since the study focuses on describing specific situations in context on the basis of the individual's experiences of this world (Kvale, 1997). In this case, the question focuses on the participants' experiences of PE in terms of self-image and how the character of these experiences are turned out in consciousness

“which is an intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5) and a phenomenological question (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2006). What the respondents experience and make conscious with regard to their self-image is dependent upon what their awareness is directed towards, and cannot be separated from the world that thought is directed towards (Bengtsson, 2001; Mark, 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 1999). It is this directedness that qualitative questions and answers concern. According to Merleau-Ponty, the individual and his or her body’s “being-in-the-world” must be understood from the basis where individual and social relations meet (Bengtsson, p. 79). This lived experience of one’s self-image is described by respondents in interviews that have been carried out. According to this methodological foundation, the study has been limited to how pupils perceive their self-image and what has influenced this self-image in the encounter between teachers and classmates during PE.

Before carrying out this study, the acquisition of consent was discussed and consent was acquired. The ethical principles guiding this research have focused upon the fact that respondents in the study are minors and that consent for involving minors in a scientific study must be received both from the parents of the child as well as from the headmaster of the compulsory school where data collection takes place. It was also important to inform the subjects, regardless of their age, that they could choose to terminate their participation in the study whenever they wished to. This information was provided prior to carrying out interviews; none of the respondents chose to leave the study.

Participants

Selection criteria for interviewees in a qualitative study are often chosen against the background that the content of interview responses must provide qualitatively good variation regarding the study question. The sampling principle used in this study was “purposive sampling” (Smith & Osborn, 2006, p. 54) in order to find a certain group who would consider the research question important and interesting. Furthermore, according to Karlsson (1995), “a good report is a naive, spontaneous account of experience” (p. 94) and thus it was important to find participants who were willing to share their experiences with a stranger. There is no precedent for sampling in answering a question about self-image and its influence upon PE, but we determined that an important criterion was that the study be conducted at a school where there was a good environment for implementing interviews. The choice was a school where good contact between the researchers and PE teachers existed as a result of previous collaboration and where PE teachers had good personal knowledge of their pupils. These were supposed to be good prerequisites for obtaining help from the teachers in recruiting participants for the study. The teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and the different ethical questions related to it prior to recruiting pupils who would be willing to take part in the study.

Selection of interviewees was carried out by one of the PE teachers who asked if certain adolescents aged 14 to 16, attending grades eight and nine would like to take part in the study. The teacher informed students that they did not need to be an expert in PE. Finally, six adolescents, four girls and two boys, aged 15 to 16 participated in the study.

Procedure

Data collection was carried out, after permission was obtained from the parents of the pupils and the headmaster of the school. Qualitative interviews were conducted corresponding to what Kvale (1997) calls an interpretive interview method in which a participant is assisted in interpreting the question under study through a series of similar questions posed as supplements to the initial question. All interviews were introduced with the same question, "Please, explain to me what self-image means to you?" and if the participant could not give such a description, other self-concepts were introduced in the same way. These questions were, for instance, about self-esteem and self-confidence which were assumed to assist the respondent in understanding the significance of the concept self-image. Follow-up questions were aimed at getting the respondent to explain in greater detail what he/she had meant. After having defined the concept of self-image, questions about self-image related to PE were asked. For example, participants were asked how self-image was affected by the content of what was taught by teachers or the communication between a participant and his/her classmates. The interviews were conducted in a separate room with each pupil for about 40-45 minutes.

Data Analysis

All the interviews were transcribed and the data were processed according to Karlsson's (1995) model for phenomenological research. Karlsson developed his model from what was presented by Giorgi (1986), but Karlsson's differs in the steps taken and by using descriptive rather than an interpretative analysis. In Giorgi's model four steps are described and in Karlsson's five steps are employed. Karlsson may have made the transformation process somewhat easier to grasp because of his fifth step. In this fifth step, one has to condense the situated structures into a general structure. Here, Karlsson introduces the term "typologies" (p. 108) as a means of facilitating the process of finding the level of abstraction that presents the results and reveals other important constituents for the study. For this study, we have followed Karlsson's five-step model. In Stage one, the goal was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the text. By reading the material several times, the researcher has commenced a simplified initial phenomenological reduction. An essential theme in the concept of self-image has been defined as something personal for the individual. The way of finding this out is through answers from the respondents such as, "How I like myself" and "How I look at myself" in terms of the question about the concept of self-image. During Stage two, meaning units in the text have been marked using different colours where the statements' meanings are altered in relation to the whole that the research question represents. For example, the respondent says something such as "I am happy" or "My classmates tell me that my hair looks nice" in response to a question concerning self-image. These two examples represent two different psychological views on self-image in which meaning is altered and is accordingly marked in different colours. During Stage three, to arrive at specific meaning units, we conducted a reduction on the basis of characteristics and certain facts related to the situation. The facts marked with the same colours have been treated in an eidetic analysis to interpret these meaning units into the psychological meaning of what the respondents have meant about the phenomenon. This "... eidetic

intuition is an identity synthesis. Through it we recognise an identity within manifolds of appearance...” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 177). For Karlsson, this means to trace what the respondents denote in a psychological sense for their self-image when a pupil said that her hair looks nice. In this process, the respondents’ everyday language is also transformed into the researcher’s language by using more everyday language which Karlsson recommends; that the respondents’ “...description of certain fact[s] has been transformed into a language of meaning” (p. 98). For example one pupil responded “I can’t manage to run fast on short tracks as my legs are too short, but my self-esteem is good if we can keep going for a long time.” When transformed in a more phenomenological sense, this statement seems to indicate that the student is dealing with success or failure.

During Stage four, the phenomenon’s significance is described structurally, that is, according to a “situated structure” (Karlsson, 1995, p. 106) which means that the transformed meaning units are synthesized in this structure to either focus the noetic or the noematic side. The structure should denote the researcher’s idea of arranging the constituents of the phenomenon in a significant way. The study is organized both noematically – how the phenomenon self-image is experienced – and noetically how this experience is constituted in the context of PE. A noematical example would be, “I feel good even if I got critique for what I am doing” and a noetical illustration is, “I can manage that because it is a way for me to make something better.” Finally, during Stage five, the different structures in Stage four are combined into two general typological structures: Theme one and Theme two. These two overarching themes have emerged in terms of understanding the meaning and essence of awareness of one’s self-image, as perceived by pupils of physical education classes in Sweden. These two themes are: *Self-image as the result of self contemplation* with its noematical categories and *Factors of influence on the pupils self-image in PE* with its noetical categories.

Trustworthiness

As to reliability, Kvale (1997) writes that consistency of results is important; this is based upon the same initial question put to all respondents. Follow-up questions similar to the initial question were posed on further occasions to test the reliability of the answers. Quotations from the respondents have been entered under various categories, in order to represent supportive data for the category. The reader will be able, using the quotations as a basis, to monitor whether or not the category’s content corresponds with what the quotations express.

The validity factor which, according to Kvale (1997) is applied to the interviewer is called handicraft skill. Prior to this study, several qualitative studies had been conducted by us as researchers. As a result we have established ways and habits of allowing respondents to express their experiences as well as ways of eliciting responses through the use of probing and follow-up questions, in order for respondents to expand their answers.

Using the term validity in the qualitative sense, intersubjectivity should be good between the interviewer and respondents in terms of the content of questions. It should be pointed out that some of the pupils did not know what self-image was as per the initial question. Instead, they answered questions during a subsequent stage on the basis of the

synonymous terms self-feeling and self-confidence. With this as a detour, the interview then continued on the basis of the term self-image, which we intended to study as a phenomenon. Thus, a certain amount of uncertainty exists in the results if this strategy implies that the initial question was not investigated reliably. However, since the aforementioned synonymous terms are so close to self-image in terms of definition, we assessed the validity of the results as acceptable.

Another validity issue concerns how the quotations have been *translated* first from spoken to written language, and then in translation from the language of origin to English. In order not to distort what the respondents said, and in order to safeguard validity, a form as close as possible to spoken language has been used in the quotations.

Results

The results of this qualitative study illustrate the complexity of the shifting meanings of self-concept according to how they have been constituted in previous research. In the phenomenological analysis conducted in the present study, the term *self-image* stands as phenomenology's noematic term and self-consciousness as a process for the constitution of self-image, the noetic side of the term. During analysis of the transcribed interview, transcripts based on the questions: *What does the term self-image entail?* and *How do pupils experience PE as influencing their self-image?*, the meaning of the phenomenon of self-image has been categorised by a main category. This is an interpretational process since it is up to researchers to select themes and group data into themes based upon transcriptions. During reporting, answers have been reported for this category that derive from terms such as self-esteem and self-confidence. As previously mentioned, some respondents were not sure what self-image meant but were able, on the other hand, to give answers on the basis of kindred terms. The same applies for the other main category, how self-image has been affected during lessons. The two main categories are: *Self-image as the result of self-contemplation* and *Factors of influence on the pupil's self-image in PE*. The variations in these two main categories have then been described using subcategories. The subcategories are: *Attitude towards oneself*, *Self-image in terms of being resilient in the face of adversity*, *Classmates' significance for self-image*, *Dealing with success or failure*, *Significance of affirmation/feedback from classmates and teachers*, *Significance of verbal and non-verbal communication*.

Theme 1 - Self-Image as a Result of Self-Contemplation

In the expression, self-image, there is a fairly self-evident sense that this is an image that a person has of him/herself. From the answers, it also emerges that self-image is not just a question like self-contemplation, but also includes an assumption of how others in the environment supposedly see the person in question. Self-image seemed to be, in that case, both a positive and a negative attitude such as, "I feel good even if I got critique for what I'm doing. I can manage that because it is a way for me to make something better."

Attitude towards oneself. This subcategory entails, for oneself, creating and verbalising an image of the awareness of self-image. One of the participants expressed

the meaning of the concept as, “it sounds like self-image is an image of oneself” and then, filling it with content which here means an evaluation, “what I think about myself and how I am myself,” which can be positive; “I’m happy and I feel good”, or negative in nature; “I’m not happy when I see myself in the mirror. I’m not the most good-looking person in the world and I look droopy.” This then results in more general terms for the meaning of the term, which points in a desirable direction. One pupil said “it’s about feeling secure in yourself and standing up for what you do” and “it’s about getting everyone to accept themselves.” This is an advanced and reflective way of conducting oneself, trying to balance the demands and expectations of others against one’s own demands, while at the same time observing exacting demands concerning care for others.

Self-image as being resilient in the face of adversity. There is a will to develop one’s self-image and to be able to deal with adversity. By means of self-confidence or self-feeling, the pupils express the fact that, using positive self-image, they are able to deal with adversity in various ways. There is a will to deal with the situation positively; “my good self-confidence hasn’t been too good, but I try to be really good with myself anyway.” There is a will to prevent negative feelings without directly dealing with these; “it’s that business of self-confidence and not trying to make yourself feel small if something happens, just get on with it.”

Classmates’ significance for self-image. Self-image is not only affected by how a person sees him/herself, but is also based on social factors such as how classmates behave towards each other; “my self-image is how I’m treated by my classmates.” The significance of classmates, in terms of what these classmates think, can actually benefit self-image; “if my classmates come up to me and say that my hair looks nice after I’ve had a haircut, then I’ll be happier and look at myself in a better light when I hear good things.” The significance of classmates to self-image can be seen as both positive and negative for self-image. The negative aspects can entail the individual becoming entirely dependent on what others (classmates) think, and shows when it comes to the development of the individual’s positive self-image. One pupil said for instance: “If I have got criticism from others I don’t think it is so nice.”

Theme 2 - Factors of Influence on the Pupils’ Self-Image in PE

In PE, social interaction takes place pupil-to-pupil and teacher-to-pupil. In this context, the pupils perform a number of movements using their entire bodies. If one fails in a movement or in a team game where pupils are to collaborate, it becomes apparent to the performer, emotionally, that he/she has not performed it well. Positive or negative self-image governs how the pupil is able to deal with his/her mental relationship to the world of PE. Confirmation/feedback from the teacher and pupil are also significant for pupil self-image.

Dealing with success or failure. In PE, respondents feel that they succeed and fail in individual exercises they deal with by revising a bodily incapacity in one context to positive capacity in another context, where they can see themselves as able to succeed. Awareness that the body is constituted in a certain way makes it possible to see the

possibilities of doing alternative, suitable sporting activities; “I can’t manage to run fast on short tracks as my legs are too short, but my self-esteem is good if we can keep going for a long time, like obstacle courses or orienteering.” One respondent expressed a type of neutral attitude towards PE: “I’m not ashamed and not bothered. I just am.” This is the kind of bodily awareness that Merleau-Ponty (2002) discusses. However, even if one has a positive self-image, taking part in a team game is more strikingly emotional if one is not as good as the others, since players depend on one another; “I’m not ashamed of not being able to do it in front of my classmates, it’s just that thing about it being a pity that I can’t.” These adolescents try to manage these situations by joining a team where the level of expertise is similar to their own; “I don’t want to end up in a group of people who play and are really good, as then there won’t be any play. Instead I try to get into a group on the same level.”

Significance of affirmation/feedback from classmates and teachers. The respondents were of the opinion that the teacher affirmation/feedback is of significance in positively developing their self-image. This entails a certain security in a learning situation; “If I do something wrong, then the teacher doesn’t try to make me feel small, instead explains what to do so that you know it next time. If I didn’t have that teacher who helped me, I wouldn’t have learnt to do a somersault.” One’s own affirmation and feedback can also strengthen one’s self-confidence as a part of a positive self-image. “Great to be able to show that you can do it, when things go well it’s fun, then my self-confidence improves and I know that they think I can do [it].” Others in the research group are of the opinion that affirmation or feedback does not mean anything as they take part in PE because they have to participate to get a grade: “You have to do it even though it’s boring to get a grade. You have to put up with it.” Indirect feedback and affirmation from the teacher is experienced positively by the respondent: “The teacher can probably see that I’m not so good but notices that I’m trying in any case.”

Significance of verbal and non-verbal communication. The adolescents in the research group had suggestions regarding how teachers could act in order to develop self-image during PE. It was a case of how teachers communicate in different situations. For instance, it is of importance that pupils understand that the teacher’s bad mood is not necessarily caused by them. A bad mood affects the subject negatively; “the teacher could tell the class - ‘now I’m tired and grumpy so you’ll have to excuse me for being like I am.’” The teacher’s body language can send both negative and positive signals concerning pupil self-image. Verbal communication and body language affect each other. If the teacher, for example, says something positive but simultaneously displays negative body language, then he or she sends mixed messages. These adolescents are of the opinion that communication should be clear and without an undertone: “that the teacher in some way tries to get the pupils to understand that most things are what you make of them. What you yourself send out in terms of signals in body language and words and looks. Get straight to the point, it’s not possible to try to explain when there’s an undertone; you have to read between the lines to understand. Spell it out so that everyone understands. Talk to each pupil and ask what they think.”

The respondents were of the opinion that uncertainty often arises when they do not get to know what they will be doing in the lesson until it has started. They would feel

more secure if they were told, one week or even further in advance, what they would be doing during the lessons. Thus, one aspect of positive self-image lies in not needing to feel insecure ahead of each PE lesson just because the content of the lesson is unknown. Foreknowledge provides these adolescents with a certain amount of security; “that the teacher runs through what we are going to do at the start of each term, and not just during the lesson – tell us the week before. Then, I’d feel more secure.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how awareness of one’s self-image is revealed as a phenomenon, and whether self-image is influenced by physical education. Sokolowski (2000) is of the opinion that the noetic side is responsible for the evaluative experience of the self and the noematic perspective is constituted by the content of what is experienced. This means that the terms self-conscious and self-image represent phenomenology’s noesis and noema, respectively. A further description is given by Karlsson (1995): “Noesis is metaphorically speaking, the streaming consciousness, and noema is the object as intended, as meant” (p. 53). Noema is, thus, how and what we, in our consciousness, perceive that something is on the basis of all of the different ways (noesis) we have experienced and experience the phenomenon.

The respondents’ experiences of how self-image was constituted in PE was subjective, *how I see myself, how others see me, and how I would like to develop*. The experience took place by means of the influence of classmates, the choice of activity, and the teacher’s communication with pupils. The presentation of how these categories relate to noema and noesis appears in the discussion of the categories.

Self-Image as the Result of Self-Contemplation

The respondent’s attitude towards himself or herself can be seen as relative to various situations. The experiencing of the self could either be positive or negative which is in agreement with Craven et al. (2003) and Ommundsen and Bar-Eli (1999). Negative feelings were related such that a person does not appreciate him/herself because of his/her own body. This is something that is common during teenage years (Blos, 1962).

There is a desire on the part of the participants in the study to keep self-image intact and noetically to prevent negative feelings in order to accept oneself as one is. This dealing with negative feelings as essential to identifying development is also something that has been indicated previously by, for instance, Branden (1994), Harter (1996, 1999), and Whitehead and Corbin (1997).

Self-image is constituted (noesis), according to the introduction, by how we assess ourselves as people and by how others look at and assess us. Using this point of departure, intentionality is directed both towards myself and towards how the other, according to Merleau-Ponty, transgresses my world and becomes “a continuation of my own existence in [the] world” (as cited in Bengtsson, 2001, p. 86). According to the answer given by one respondent, a further direction can be discerned from the intentionality concerning self-image constitution; the respondent attempts to achieve a balanced attitude between his self-image and consideration for the other.

Factors of Influence on Pupils' Self-Image in PE

In PE, social interaction takes place between the individuals included in this context. The PE situation also requires collaboration, in terms of physical activity both individually and in groups. What occurs does so in an arena that is possible to observe and evaluate by all participants. According to Craven et al. (2003), this is of significance for positive or negative self-image. An awareness of limitations in body constitution, as well as the risk of feedback that augments the conception of shortcomings during sporting activities, can cause an individual to choose an alternative attitude. This attitude is composed of an intellectual construction with an inbuilt readiness to act, which entails that the individual is aware of his or her limitations and sees the opportunity to seek out other activities or groups as a solution. Another strategy entails mentally being in the situation, not caring about any shortcomings and just accepting the state of affairs. The described strategies can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's (2002) thoughts on consciousness in terms of "I can" (p. 159) instead of "I'm thinking of" (p. 159). The described strategies become one way for the individual to noetically keep his or her self-image intact in terms of, "I am my body" (p. 115).

The need for feedback and affirmation from classmates and teachers is of significance to self-image. Feedback causes the individual's perception (noema) of him/herself to be adapted (noesis) in the direction of the content of the assessment. Self-image is especially affected by feedback from peers and teachers, and a negative or positive self-image is created; this development is in accord with Harter (1996).

Participants in this study are of the opinion that their self-image is augmented by feedback from the teacher, either through the teacher affirming something they have done correctly or their own display of something with their bodies. This is also in line with Morgan and Welton (1992) and Coakley (1997). On the other hand, incongruence between verbal and non-verbal communication is perceived very negatively. Mixed messages (i.e., when the teacher verbally expresses something positive while simultaneously expressing something negative via body language) are perceived as affecting self-image negatively. This incongruent communication gives rise to interpretation problems and pupils become uncertain about whether this negative message is directed at them. According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), the significance is experienced in direct gestures and mimicry. Participants in the study are of the opinion that communication must be clear and without any undertones.

Another factor augmenting self-image as related to PE concerns the predictability of lesson content. Participants in the study are of the opinion that knowledge of what awaits them creates security. If there is uncertainty regarding what is to be done and what is expected of them, this counteracts positive self-image.

In sum, it can be assumed that the significance of self-image is dialectically constituted and is made up of reciprocal action between the noetic side of the phenomenon and the noematic. The noetic side of the phenomenon of "self-image" stands for the evaluative experiencing of the self while the noematic perspective is made up of the content of that which is experienced. Contributing to self-image is how others of significance affirm and give feedback. This evaluative feedback may be assumed to constitute the phenomenon's noetic as well as noematic sides.

The advantage of a qualitative phenomenological study is that it shows different qualitative characteristics as regards the term self-image when related to PE in schools. Accordingly to what Merleau-Ponty's (1999, 2002) theory about body awareness suggests a person does not have a body like he/she has any other object, but that he or she actually is the body, the consequences for education in PE is that teachers should focus more on handling the importance of self-image in PE. Participants have described something that is interpreted as strategies for avoiding negative influence on self-image. However, this study is small in scope and further investigations should be carried out in order to provide additional perspectives on the term self-image.

Further studies of PE will be conducted by observation and interview. Interviews have been conducted with PE teachers about how to handle their influence on pupils' self-image. What can be seen from these interviews is that the teachers have some good ideas about what can be done, but they also say that they do not practice these ideas during their lessons. Observations concern communication between the PE teacher and pupils during PE-lessons, for instance how feedback is offered and the content of feedback. Interviews and the observation will hopefully offer more knowledge for PE teachers in training about how to handle self-image in school.

One of the contributions to the literature is that this study is based on first-hand sources about the phenomenon of self-image. A methodological strength according to van Manen (1990), the phenomenological interviews have helped us to get in touch with the pupils' experiences of what they mean by the phenomenon and how the pupils' self-image have been influenced by PE. One methodological limitation might have been that the interviews were conducted separately from the activities of the PE lesson. Perhaps if we had used a videotape from the lessons it might have been easier to be intersubjective about what activities the pupils were referring to- since both the pupils and the researchers would be able to look at the activities and the interviews could be performed while looking at the videos.

References

- Ahlgren, R-M. (1991). *Skolelevers självvärdering* [Pupil's assessment of themselves]. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Bean, L., & Lipka, R. (1984). *Self-concept, self-esteem and the curriculum*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bengtsson, J. (2001). *Sammanflätning från Husserl till Merleau-Ponty* [From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty]. Göteborg, Sweden: Daidalos AB.
- Blos, P. (1962). *On adolescence: A psychoanalytic interpretation*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Branden, N. (1994). *Six pillars of self-esteem*. New York, NY: Bantam.
- Brissett, D. (1972). Toward a clarification of self-esteem. *Psychiatry*, 35, 255-263.
- Coakley, J. (1997). *Sport in society. Issues and controversies*. San Francisco, CA: WCB/McGraw-Hill.
- Craven, R., Marsh, H., & Burnett, P. (2003). Cracking the self-concept enhancement conundrum. In H. Marsh, R. Carven, & D. M. McInerney (Eds.), *International advances in self research* (pp. 91-126). Greenwich, CT: IAP Information Age.

- Duesund, L. (1996). *Kropp, kunskap och självuppfattning* [Knowledge, body and self-image]. Stockholm, Sweden: Liber Utbildning AB.
- Erikson, E. H. (1977). *Barnet och samhället* [Childhood and society]. Stockholm, Sweden: Natur och kultur.
- Fox, K. R. (1988). The self-esteem and complex youth fitness. *Quest*, 40, 230-246.
- Fox, K. R. (1997). The physical self and processes in self-esteem development. In K. R. Fox (Ed.), *The physical self: From motivation to wellbeing* (pp. 111-137). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Giorgi, A. (1986). Theoretical justification for the use of descriptions in psychological research. In P. D. Aschworth, A. Giorgi, & A. J. J. de Koning (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 3-22). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Giorgi, A., & Giorgi, B. (2006). Phenomenology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 25-50). London, UK: Sage.
- Goodwin, S. (1999). Developing self-esteem in physical education. *Physical Educator*, 56, 210-214.
- Harter, S. (1996). Historical roots of contemporary issues involving self-concept. In B. Bracken (Ed.), *Handbook of self-concept: Developmental, social and clinical considerations* (pp.1-37). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Hattie, J. (2003). Getting back on the correct pathway for self-concept research in the new millennium. In H. W. Marsh, R. G. Craven, & D. McInerney (Eds.), *International advances in self research* (pp.127-142). Greenwich, CT: IAP Information AGE.
- Karlsson, G. (1995). *Psychological qualitative research from a phenomenological perspective*. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Kerry, D., & Armour, K. (2000). *Sport sciences and the promise of phenomenology: Philosophy, method, and insight*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Kvale, S. (1997). Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun [The qualitative research interview]. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Lindwall, M. (2004). *Exercising the self: On the role of exercise, gender and culture in physical self-perception*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Lintunen, T. (1999). Development of self-perception during the school years. In Y. Vanden Auweele, F. Bakker, S. Biddle, M. Durand, & R. Seiler (Eds.), *Psychology for physical educators* (pp.115-134). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Mark, E. (1998). *Självbilder och jagkonstitution* [Self-images and the construction of the ego]. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Acta Universitatis, Göteborg, Sweden.
- Marsh, H. W., Craven, R. G., & McInerney, D. (2003). International advances in self research. Speaking to the future. In H. V. Marsh, R. G. Craven, & D. M. McInerney (Eds.), *International advances in self research* (pp.3-14). Greenwich, CT: IAP Information Age.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1999). *Kroppens fenomenolog* [The phenomenology of the body]. Göteborg, Sweden: Bokförlaget Daidalos AB.

- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *The phenomenology of perception*. London, UK: Routledge Classics.
- Morgan, J., & Welton, P. (1992). *See what I mean*. London, UK: Edward Arnold.
- Moser, T. (2006). *Hva kan idretten laere meg om meg selv? - Om forholdet mellom selvbilde og deltakelse i idretts/fysiske aktiviteter* [What can I learn about myself when sporting? - The relation between self-image and participation in sports and physical activities]. Retrieved from <http://idrottsforum.org>
- Ommundsen, Y., & Bar-Eli, M. (1999). Psychological outcomes: Theories, research, and recommendation for practise. In Y. Vanden, F. Bakker, S. Biddle, M. Durand, & R. Seiler (Eds.), *Psychology for physical educators* (pp.73-113). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Oyserman, D., & Marcus, H. R. (1998). Self as social representation. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The psychology of the social* (pp. 107-125). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Schutz, A., & Luckmann, T. (1974). *Structures of the life-world* (Vol. 1). London, UK: Heineman.
- Shavelson, R. J. (2003). Preface. In H. W. Marsh, R. G. Craven, & D. M. McInterney (Eds.), *International advances in self research* (pp. ix–xiv). Greenwich, CT: IAP Information AGE.
- Skolverket. (2003). *Skolämnet idrott och hälsa i Sveriges skolor – En utvärdering av läget hösten 2002* [The Swedish National Board of Education. An assessment of physical education in Swedish schools, autumn 2002]. Stockholm, Sweden: Author.
- Skolverket. (2006). *Styrdokument: Kursplaner och betygskriterier grundskolan* [The Swedish National Board of Education: Syllabus and grading criteria]. Retrieved from <http://www.skolverket.se>
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2006). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 53-80). London, UK: Sage.
- Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sonstroem, R. J. (1997). The physical self-system: A mediator of exercise and self-esteem. In K. R. Fox (Ed.), *The physical self from motivation to well-being* (pp. 3-26). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Sparkes, A. (1997). Reflections on the socially constructed physical self. In K. R. Fox (Ed.), *The physical self from motivation to well-being* (pp. 83-119). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., Chang-Schneider, C., & McClarty, K. L. (2007). Do people's self views matter? Self-concept and self-esteem in everyday life. *American Psychologist*, 62, 84-94.
- Swartling-Widerström, K. (2005). *To have or to be body. A text analytical study of compulsory subject physical education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Orebro University, Sverige, Sweden.
- van Assche, E., Vanden Auweele, Y., Metlushko, O., & Rzewnicki, R. (1999). Prologue. In Y. van Auweele, F. Bakker, S. Biddle, M. Durand, & R. Seiler (Eds.),

- Psychology for physical educators* (pp. xiii-xviii). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience. Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario, Canada: The State University of New York Press.
- Whitehead, J., & Corbin, C. (1997). Self-esteem in children and youth: The role of sport and physical education. In K. R. Fox (Eds.), *The physical self from motivation to well-being* (pp. 175-203). Champaign IL: Human Kinetics.
-

Author Note

Renée Perrin-Wallqvist, PhD, is an assistant professor of psychology at Karlstad University. Her specific research interest is fire prevention and arson in childhood and adolescence. Her major focus lies in the field of developmental psychology. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to: Dr. Renée Perrin-Wallqvist at, Karlstad University, S-651 88 Karlstad, Sweden; Work telephone: +46 054 - 70017 70 or Mobile phone: +46 070 220 2180; Email: Renee.Perrin-Wallqvist@kau.se

Eva Segolsson Carlsson is a lecturer in sports science and a PhD student in psychology. Her research interest is investigating the relationship between self-image and physical education. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed to: Eva Segolsson Carlsson at, Karlstad University, S-651 88 Karlstad, Sweden; Work telephone: +46 054-700 11 17; Email: Eva.Segolsson@kau.se

Copyright 2011: Renée Perrin-Wallqvist, Eva Segolsson Carlsson, and Nova Southeastern University

Article Citation

Perrin-Wallqvist, R., & Carlsson, E. S. (2011). Self-image and physical education – A phenomenological study. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(4), 933-948. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR16-4/perrin.pdf>
