

ARTICLE REVIEWED

Urban African-American Girls' Participation and Future Intentions Toward Physical Education.

Shen, B., Rinehart-Lee, T., McCaughtry, N., & Li, X. (2012). Urban African-American girls' participation and future intentions toward physical education. *Sex Roles*, 67(5-6), 323–333. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0179-6>.

THE PROBLEM

Urban African-American girls frequently experience a decline in interest and participation in physical education (PE) after meeting their mandatory requirements in high school. This trend is attributed to several barriers, including unfavorable attitudes toward PE, limited social support from peers and family, body image concerns, and scheduling conflicts with other academic priorities. Many students feel that PE classes are not designed to meet their unique needs or address the challenges they face. These issues are especially pronounced in under-resourced urban schools, where programs often fail to provide culturally sensitive or gender-responsive instruction. As a result, these girls are less likely to see the value of continuing with PE courses, further exacerbating disparities in physical activity levels.



Research Summary

This study examined factors affecting the participation and future enrollment intentions of 168 African-American girls aged 14 to 17 in urban high schools. The research utilized the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and feminist poststructuralist theory to explore the influences of attitudes, social pressures, and perceived control on students' decisions. The findings indicated that participation in PE significantly increased physical activity levels on school days. However, students expressed unfavorable attitudes, lack of support, and scheduling conflicts as significant deterrents. Key predictors of enrollment intentions included: behavioral beliefs about health and enjoyment benefits; normative beliefs shaped by influences from mothers, peers, and teachers; and control beliefs related to logistical issues like inadequate facilities and limited scheduling flexibility. Additionally, body image concerns, particularly around appearance and hygiene, were frequently cited as barriers to participation.

Conclusion

The study highlights the need for culturally responsive and gender-sensitive PE programs to address the specific barriers faced by urban African-American girls. To increase enrollment in elective PE courses, schools must address stereotypes, improve facilities, offer flexible scheduling, and engage parents — particularly mothers — in creating supportive environments. Providing early education on the short- and long-term benefits of physical activity is essential to encourage lifelong engagement.

Key Takeaway

Urban African-American girls encounter multiple barriers to PE participation, including body image concerns, negative attitudes, and logistical challenges. Positive attitudes and supportive influences from family, peers, and teachers play a crucial role in shaping future enrollment intentions. PE programs should prioritize inclusivity, practical accommodations, and parental involvement to foster meaningful participation and improve physical activity engagement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Reed, J. A., Maslow, A. L., Long, S., & Hughey, M. (2013). Examining the impact of 45 minutes of daily physical education on cognitive ability, fitness performance, and body composition of African American youth. *Journal of physical activity & health*, 10(2), 185–197. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.10.2.185>