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A comparative case study of the changing attitudes of gender to PE and sport.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Introduction

This piece of research is a comparative case study that aims to examine the changing attitudes of gender to PE and sport. This paper will look more specifically at how the attitudes of year 2 boys and girls can differ to year 6 boys and girls. The rationale for this focus was due to the increasing concerns that teachers are reflecting the gender expectations of society in their physical education lessons, and the fact that children are being exposed to and affected by these gender stereotypes in sport (Davis, 2003; Avraam and Anagnostou, 2022; Alcaraz-Muñoz, 2023; Deng, 2023). This decision also stemmed from how I have experienced these gender stereotypes first-hand and have observed these over my school experiences.

This research was conducted at the researcher's final school placement and used a mixed method approach, utilising the strengths of interviews and questionnaires. 24 children took part in this process, which were categorised by age and gender, which included 6 boys and 6 girls from year 2 and 6 boys and 6 girls from year 6.

To address the focus of this study, this paper will examine three key themes (which emerged from the data) in correlation to the current literature and findings of this study while taking into consideration the methods that were used. This research project aims to highlight the correlations between children's experiences, opinions and viewpoints and gender in physical education and sport. This was done in two different years of the school – year 2 and year 6 – to address how age can affect these decisions and attitudes and how the viewpoints of children can change when they get older. The analysis of the data and the conclusions made will help to discover a deeper understanding of the attitudes that children hold towards gender in sport. Consequently, this can inform the future practice of, and decisions made by, myself, other teachers and perhaps early career teachers and students joining this profession.

Literature Review

There is a necessity to clarify what is meant by gender equality and gender stereotypes as these terms will be used throughout. Defining gender equality can be seen as complex because of the varying definitions. For Davis (2003) and Klein *et al.*, (2014), gender equality can be seen as men and women being given the chance to acquire equitable opportunities regardless of their gender. This differs, however, to the likes of Subrahmaniam (2005) and UN Women (2019) who describe gender equality as the right to gender parity and equal outcomes for both men and women. For gender equality to be present, however, it is evident that there must be a decrease in the use of gender stereotyping (Klein *et*

al., 2014). Gender stereotypes can loosely be described as the generalisations made about the attributes of both men and women simply because they belong to a gender group; these stereotypes define what men and women *should do or should be like* (Heilman, 2012; Ellemers, 2018).

Although Gerdin and Pringle (2022) suggest that physical education fosters the ability for all children (no matter their gender) to be active and a critical consumer, this interpretation differs to Davis (2003) and Kirk (2020) who believe we find ourselves living with inequalities in physical education. Thus, current literature portrays the consensus that there are challenges regarding gender in physical education (Sánchez-Hernández *et al.*, 2018). This section aims to use three overarching themes to review existing literature that surrounds gender in physical education, and the complex ideas it encompasses.

Boys versus Girls

A large and growing body of literature has highlighted the ongoing challenge of how PE can contribute to and challenge gender and power relations (Doherty and Brennan, 2010; Mansfield *et al.*, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández *et al.*, 2018). As noted by Youth Sport Trust (2023) the participation rates of girls are significantly lower than that of the boys. However, one major drawback of this method is that 18,000 girls took part in the survey and only 6000 boys took part. Thus, the validity of this research could be susceptible to criticism as the number of boys and girls participating should be similar to better reflect participation rates. However, Sport England (2019) can support these findings from a more valid study conducted on 130,000 boys and girls where they found boys are more likely to be more active than girls. Furthermore, this difference in participation rates could be in relation to how gender stereotypes affect children, which will be discussed below (Bramham, 2003; Van Aart *et al.*, 2015).

While Drummond (2019) suggests that it is essential to reject categories of masculinity and femininity because they conceal gender performance character, research has highlighted that there are still gender stereotypes in sport and everyday aspects around children's lives (Parri and Ceciliani, 2019). To illustrate this, gender stereotypes are reinforced from a very young age and traditionally lead the dads to teach their sons football, and mums to take their daughters to dance classes (Doherty and Brennan, 2010; Williams, 2012). A study conducted by Parri and Ceciliani (2019) suggests that this causes the boys to seek more competitive sports such as football and girls to seek more female specified sports such as dancing. While this study may lack reliability as they make no attempt to interview or question the children to gain an insight into their thoughts and experiences, Cárcamo, Moreno and del Barrio (2020) can support this argument with the same findings from qualitative research, which uses interviews on 15 girls and 15 boys.

A reason for these gender stereotypes discussed above could be down to the language the children are exposed to from an early age. Castillo Andrés *et al.* (2012) observed 4 teachers teach 48 physical education lessons and results concluded that teachers generally call upon the male students to carry out resources, demonstrate skills and use more male images for visual learning. While the limitation of this research is due to the source being from a Spanish school, and thus affecting the generalisability in English schools, this same pattern can be seen in research in English primary schools conducted by the likes of Vu *et al.* (2006), Doherty and Brennan (2010), and Williams (2012). These researchers found that teachers are calling upon 'strong boys' to carry equipment out and thus exposing children to language that creates gender specified sports and skills. Consequently, language including 'tom-boy' and 'he will grow out of it' may be identified when children find pleasures in non-traditional gender specified sports (Gerdin, 2017).

The effect of this language described above creates PE classes that are pervaded with sex-based roles and sports that reinforce girls are inferior to boys (Gerdin, 2017; Drummond, 2019). This can include aggressive, strong, male dominant and assertive sports being promoted to boys (Williams, 2012; Griggs and Petrie, 2017; Parri and Ceciliani, 2019) and more artistic, quieter, elegant and less physical sports such as gymnastics are promoted to girls (Dowling, 2006; Williams, 2012). Marta *et al.* (2012), Capel and Piotrowski (2013) and Lisowski, Kantanista and Bronikowski (2020) suggest this is due to the biological differences which make boys taller, faster and affect their achievements in PE. However, Telford *et al.* (2016) offer a differing viewpoint and reveal that children are influenced by multiple factors including the individual, the environment and family and therefore should not be pushed towards sports that are so gender specific based on their physical attributes. In summary of this section, it has been shown that boys and girls are susceptible to gender stereotyping from a young age and can ultimately be pressurised to participate in sports that are fit for their gender. What follows is an account of how these attitudes change as the children begin to get older.

Getting Older

Turning now to the effects of how children's attitudes change as they get older. Research suggests that with increasing age comes a decrease in interest in sport (With-Nielsen and Pfister, 2011). A factor of this could be reaching puberty and becoming more aware of the ever-changing aspects of their bodies (Williams and Cliffe, 2011). However, this section aims to show the difference between the two genders as the children get older.

On the topic of getting older, there is ample evidence and extensive research to suggest that as girls get older their attitude towards physical education changes (Dwyer *et al.*, 2006; Williams and Cliffe, 2011;

With-Nielson and Pfister, 2011; Duffey *et al.*, 2021). This can be supported by the findings of Dabell (2017) who highlight that by the age of 7 girls are already less active than boys and this disparity opens further as they reach adolescence. Factors that contribute to this attitude change is largely to do with body weight and appearance (Williams and Cliffe, 2011; Griggs, 2015). To delve into this further, Dabell (2017) has found that 24% of girls view low confidence as a barrier to physical activity because of the concern of how attractive and feminine they look while participating in sport (Dwyer *et al.*, 2006; Griggs, 2015; Griggs and Petrie, 2017). Furthermore, there is also a sense that girls are fearful of joining in as there is a risk of feeling embarrassed (Shropshire 1997). Although this study was conducted over 25 years ago, this limitation could be overlooked due to the large sample size of 924 children as well as recent researchers such as Williams and Cliffe (2011) and Fiset (2012) who can corroborate these findings. Ultimately, research shows as girls reach an older age (or when puberty takes its place) barriers begin to form and girls' attitude begins to change which reduces their participation rates in PE (Youth Sport Trust, 2023). This concept of girls feeling embarrassed draws a link to the work of Gerdin (2017) and Drummond (2019) who acknowledge that girls start to feel inferior to boys.

Surprisingly, in contrast to the ample evidence on girls' attitudes as they get older, there is very limited literature surrounding the changing attitudes towards physical education of boys when they get older. Studies show that the interest in physical education does decline with age for boys and girls, but this decline is more apparent for girls (Shropshire, 1997). However, boys continue to have a significantly more positive attitude towards physical education with reasonings suggesting that girls are more exposed to change around this time in their life (Marttinen, Fredrick and Silverman, 2018). The limited literature shows that because boys show a significantly lower rate of attitude change towards physical education and sport than girls, there is a larger focus on the changing attitudes of girls and how to improve these (Arabaci, 2009). There may be a cause for criticism here, as this study was conducted in a Turkish secondary school and therefore may not be deemed reliable. However, Mercier *et al.* (2017) can support these findings from a study conducted on both boys and girls from years 5 and 6 which illustrate that girls' attitudes decrease significantly faster than boys.

Fair is Fair

The stereotypes discussed above can often lead to pedagogical practices that create challenges with gender in sport (Sánchez-Hernández *et al.*, 2018). Although each child has the right to an education and to be treated as an individual, no matter their gender (United Nations 1948; The Equality Act, 2010;

Williams and Cliffe, 2011; UNCRC 2023), it can be argued that gender discrimination and gender appropriations dominate current practice (Griggs, 2015; Drummond, 2019). To illustrate these stereotypes in sport, what follows is a review of the current literature which discusses how access to sporting opportunities is not as equal as it should be.

There are far more opportunities for boys to take part in more physical and aggressive extra-curricular activities than girls (Williams, 2012). To develop on this idea, these extra-curricular activities are often run by men with the majority of the participants being boys (Williams, 2012). Furthermore, it is not always about having less opportunities, some girls do not have access to these activities at all because the illusion that boys are stronger than girls fail to provide gender equity in sport (Williams and Cliffe, 2011; Mansfield *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, this can confirm and link to the study conducted by Youth Sport Trust (2023) where more boys are participating in extra-curricular physical activities.

While Lagestad, Ropo and Bratbakk (2021) suggest that gender related searches in physical education and sports is often related to girls' inclusion rates, Williams and Cliffe (2011) suggest that when children transfer to secondary school it is often the boys who have limited sporting experiences because of the gender separation (Williams, 2012). While Davis (2003) and Drummond (2019) implies that developing single sex PE classes improves the levels of physical activity levels, physical skills and engage children in sport for both genders, Raymond (2005) contrasts this idea by highlighting that mixing gender groups does not disadvantage pupils and gender should not be used as a criterion to group children. Doherty and Brennan (2010), on the other hand, offer an alternative viewpoint by emphasising that by making activities and opportunities fairer, the learning does not become fairer. To elaborate on this, by having a mixed group of both genders (which would be fair) Doherty and Brennan (2010) believe that it would not be in the best interests of the children because the children would learn and develop more when in their own gendered groups.

This section has attempted to provide a summary of the literature relating to the equal opportunities boys and girls have in sport and sporting activities. It has been found that boys and girls are often separated based on gender and the opportunities are often limited because of their gender.

Methodology

Research Approach

In the section that follows, there will be a focus on the research methods used in this small-scale case study. It is necessary here to clarify that there are no set definitions of a case study, due to the complexity of the phrase, but can be described as an investigation of a phenomenon from different

angles using multiple data sources (Gomm, Hammerly and Foster, 2000; Punch and Oancea, 2014; Yin, 2014; Thomas, 2021). A case study was most appropriate for this research project because it offers a holistic view of an individual, event, or project (Wilson, 2017; Denscombe, 2021). In this case, 24 children were given a questionnaire to fill out and were interviewed to investigate personal experiences and opinions to allow a rich and deep understanding of the children's perceptions (Muganga, 2015; Coe *et al.*, 2021). These 24 children were split up into year group and gender meaning 12 boys (6 from year 2 and 6 from year 6) and 12 girls (6 from year 2 and 6 from year 6) were involved in the research project. While this may be the most common method (Wilson, 2017) researchers may confront some scepticism about the generalisability of the findings due to the small sample size (Punch and Oancea, 2009; Yin, 2014; Descombe 2021). However, this is justifiable as Wilson (2017) suggests there was only a limited time frame, and the results can still be deemed reliable as the combination of qualitative and quantitative data are used, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Data Collection

A mixed method approach was deemed the most appropriate for this research project to gain an insight into the children's attitudes and opinions (Coe *et al.*, 2021). Research projects are rated highly in terms of their triangulation (Yin, 2014) which is why this piece of research required using questionnaires (quantitative data) and interviews (qualitative data) to address and answer the research question (Denscombe, 2021; Thomas, 2022). As suggested by Kumar (2019) qualitative data, alone, does not offer much validity or reliability, which is why it is essential to use both methodological approaches to take advantage of the complementarity strengths of each (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010) One of the major advantages of this, being that one can corroborate their findings from one method against the other to give explanations (Barbour, 2014; Williman, 2018; Coe *et al.*, 2021; Denscombe, 2021). In order to get a robust sample size, 12 children from each year group filled out a questionnaire and were interviewed and all of whom were selected randomly to avoid any bias and any chance of influencing the sample in some way (Check and Schutt, 2011; Denscombe, 2021). To deeply understand the data, the data was compiled, analysed and then coded. Thematic coding is an important tool when using qualitative data and allows the identification and meaning of key themes that emerge within the data (Harding, 2018; Gibbs, 2021)

Questionnaires

The present study uses questionnaires which were designed to analyse the children's opinions and experiences; these were done on 12 children from year 2 and 12 children from year 6. It was made known from Denscombe (2021) that the success of questionnaires depends on the willingness of the

respondents taking the time to answer the questions. As a result, the questionnaires were kept as short as possible to make the process quite short, and the only questions asked were vital for research. While I understand that the responses can be influenced by peers and other questions and thus affecting the truthfulness and validity of the responses (Kumar, 2019; Denscombe 2021), interviews were also used to complement the strengths but also overcome the weaknesses (Williman, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are referred to as the gold standard of research that allows one to truly understand humans while providing a rich and in-depth exchange between the researcher and the researched (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Barbour, 2014). Consequently, semi-structured interviews were used here to allow the 24 interviewees to speak widely and freely while having some structure (Barbour, 2014; Denscombe, 2014; Kumar, 2019). Interviews were purposefully done after questionnaires to provide a more in-depth verbal answer to the written responses on the questionnaires. The semi-structured interviews had 4 main questions and there was the opportunity to speak freely about topics that arose from the interview. Despite the benefits that interviews hold, acknowledgements do have to be made regarding the limitations of the use of semi-structured interviews. Denscombe (2014) and Kumar (2019) address the problem of how a setting can change the naturalness of the setting and thus cause answers to change. To overcome this, the interview was conducted in a small, quiet library in the school where the children could speak freely without distraction from noise or adults. There is also, however, the possibility of research bias in the way certain questions were phrased or the response which could potentially affect the validity of the research (Murray Thomas and Brubaker, 2008). This was understood before the research took place and the exact phrasing of the children was written down and was not adapted to benefit the research in any way.

Ethical considerations

When carrying out a research project, ethical approval is essential to protect all participants and meet ethical standards (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). To ensure this research was conducted with good intentions - just like Denscombe (2014) highlights - ethical clearance was obtained and approved by York St John University and ethical guidelines were followed. As recommended by Clough and Nutbrown (2012), gate-keeper consent was granted by the head teacher at the researchers' placement. All participants, of the interviews and questionnaires, were given full explanations of the research project, and their consent was sought before the data collection began. To show this research was fair,

rigorous, and done respectfully, there was no pressure on the participants, and they were made aware that they could withdraw at any point during the research; full anonymity was used to ensure confidentiality throughout (Wilson, 2017; Thomas, 2022).

Findings

The evidence collected from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview highlighted three key themes from different perspectives of the same issue:

- Boys vs girls
- Getting older
- Fair is fair

Theme 1: Boys Vs Girls

One of the most common themes that emerged from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was the gender stereotypes behind the boys' and girls' choices in sport. As can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the boys' favourite sporting activities are very male specific and fit with the gender stereotypes that boys are better at more physical sports, including football. This was also evident in the interview with both year groups, however slightly more evident in the year 6s. When asked if football was for boys only, one year 2 child responded with *"girls can play football, look at the women's world cup."* When the same question was asked in year 6, Child D responded with *"boys are better at it so yes"* Child C also conformed to this stereotype by adding *"some girls do play it, but it is more for boys because it is more physical."* The attitude that boys are better at physical sports was also highlighted by a year 6 boy who suggested that *"boys can dance but only to lift the girls"* This data suggests that this is the start of children adhering to gender stereotypes in sporting activities and believing that boys are stronger and therefore better at sport.

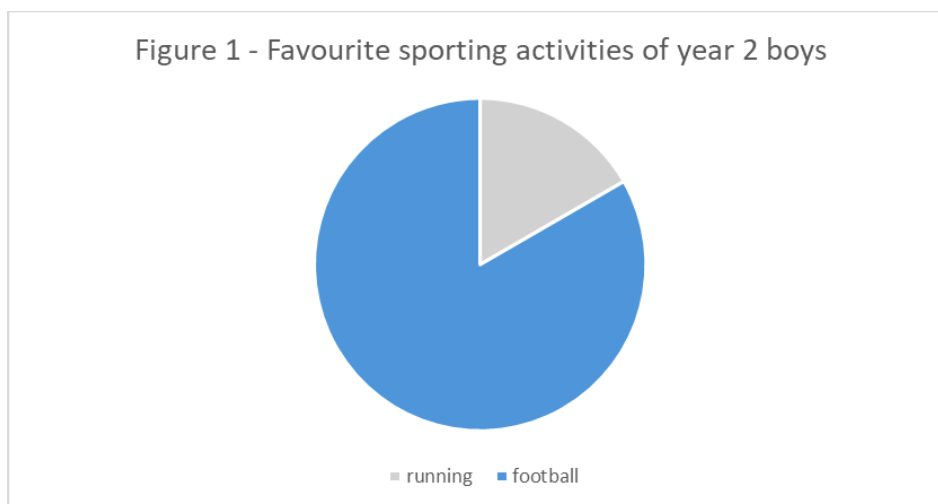
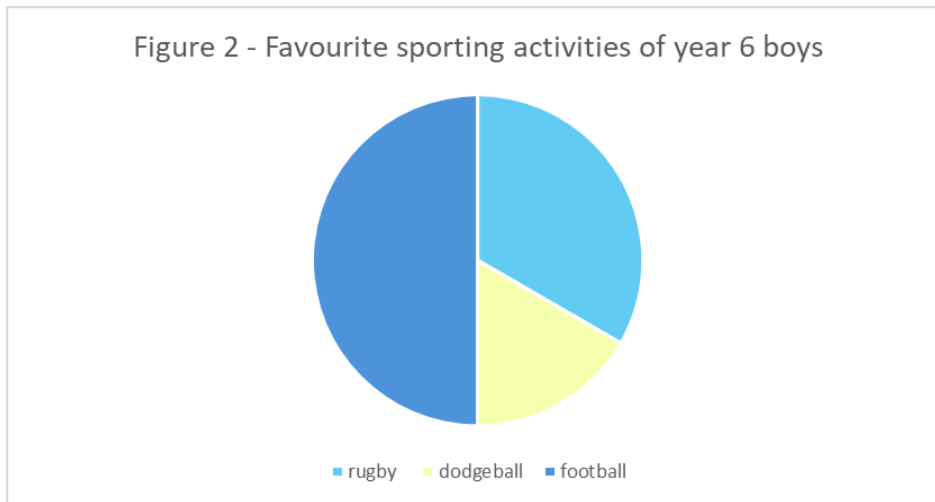


Figure 2 - Favourite sporting activities of year 6 boys



Turning now to Figures 3 and 4 which show the girls favourite sporting activities which heavily shows gender specified sports. Interestingly, the year 2 girls show a more diverse range of sporting activities which are clarified in the interviews when Child E mentions that their favourite thing to do in PE was football because *“it [football] can be for boys and girls”* and Child A shares this idea and suggests that *“girls and boys can be gymnasts because we are the same.”* This data implies the idea that gender does not play a part in the year 2 girls’ favourite sports because they believe that sport does not have a gender and they should be allowed to play any sports because they are equal.

This differs, however, to the thoughts of the year 6 girls. As seen in Figure 4, the year 6 girls are conforming to society's gender norms. These sports are more female dominated, and this was highlighted by Child D who states that *“girls are naturally more flexible and have skills naturally”* and therefore only girls should participate in gymnastics. This gender stereotype was also seen in the interview with the year 6 girls when the children were asked if boys were better at sports than girls. Child D agreed with this statement and highlighted that *“boys are stronger naturally, so they are”*. From this analysis, one can see that the attitudes towards gender are shown from the early stages of primary school and become more apparent in the last year of primary school.

Figure 3 - Favourite sporting activities of year 2 girls

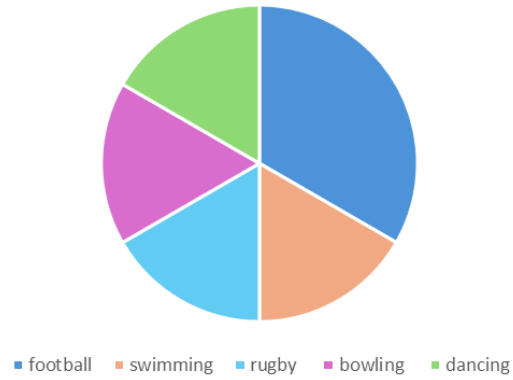
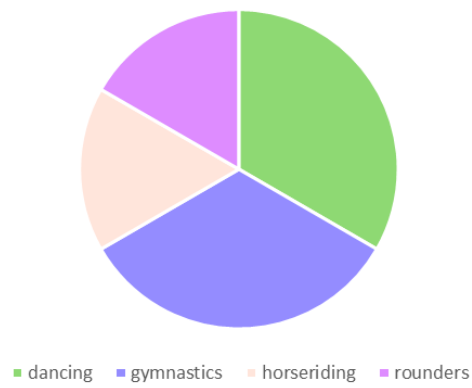
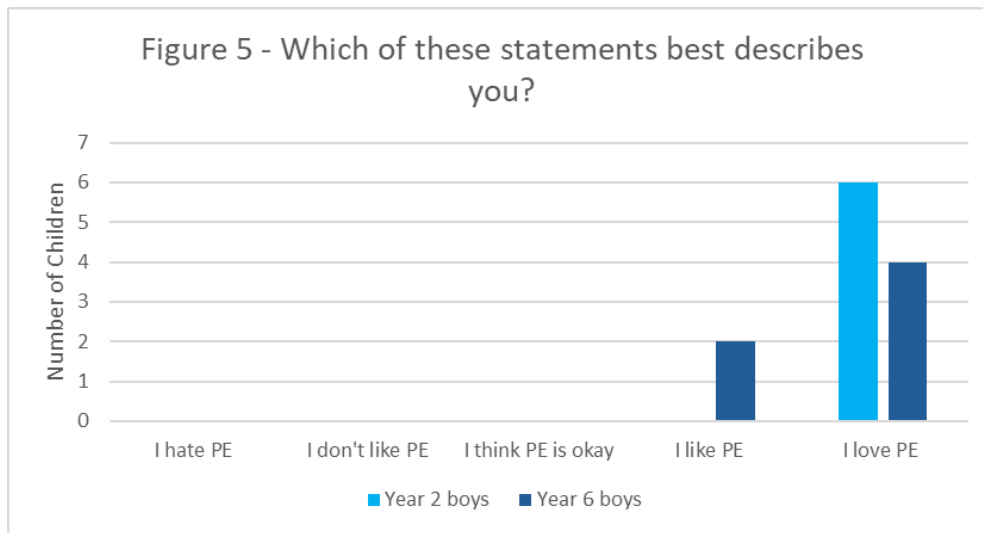


Figure 4 - Favourite sporting activities of year 6 girls

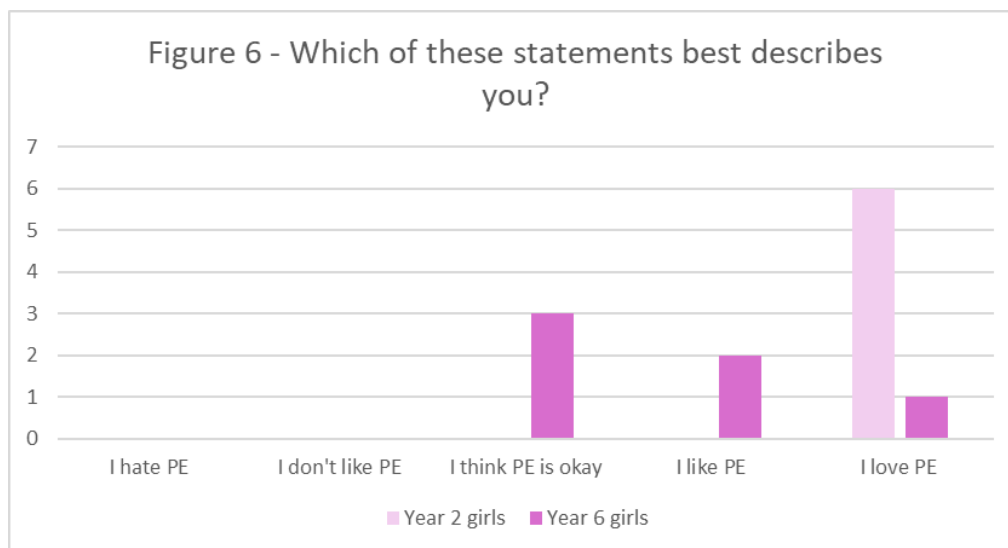


Theme 2: Getting Older

Another common theme to arise was how children are getting older and their attitudes towards sport and sporting activities are changing. While there is a shift in attitudes for boys, it is significantly more noticeable with the girls. As seen in Figure 5, every year 2 boy said they loved PE, which differs from year 6 boys. While most of the year 6 boys stated that they love PE, 2 boys stated they like PE giving reasons in the interview including *“I don’t like it when we do gymnastics because it’s boring and I’m not flexible.”* The reasoning behind the loss of love for PE was due to the boys participating in sports that are more girl specified.



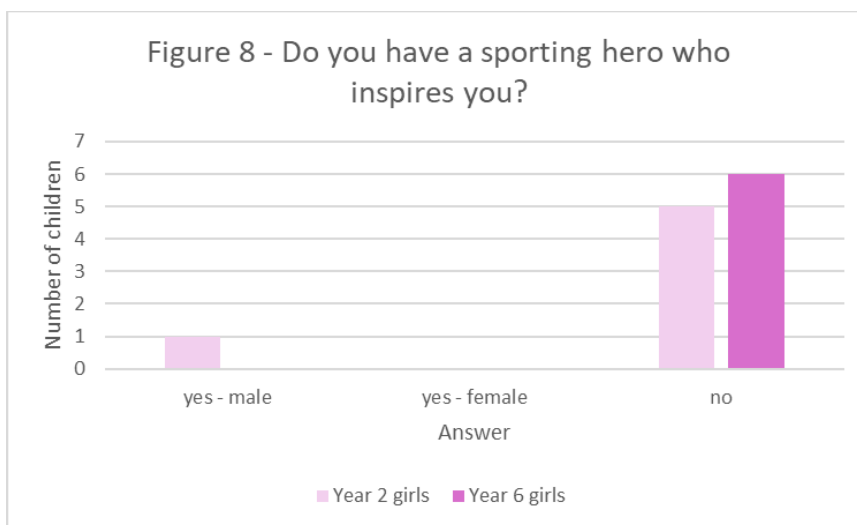
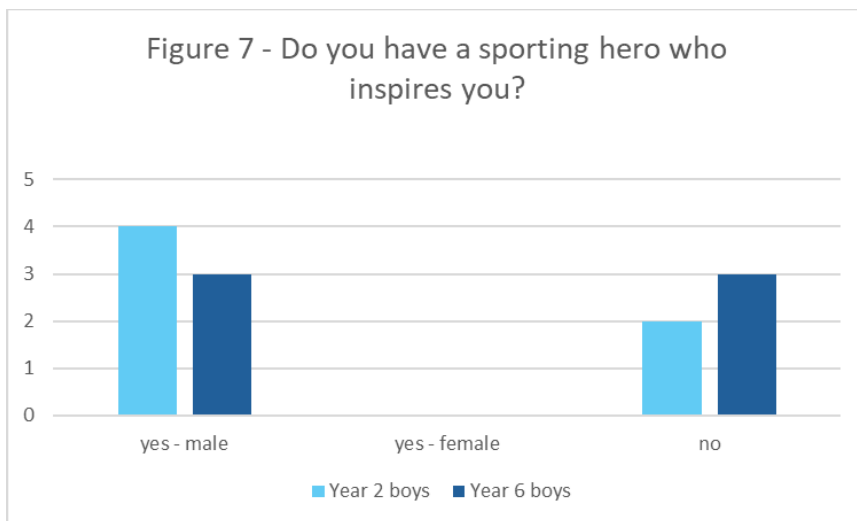
Similarly, in year 2 (as seen in Figure 6) every year 2 girl describes themselves as loving PE. This then drastically changes when the year 6 girls respond with half of them thinking that it is okay. When interviewing the year 6 children, comments suggested that the main reasons for the loss of love for PE was the fact that the girls *“don't like to get muddy and sweaty”* and that *“the boys are too aggressive.”* This chart shows the start of a change in attitudes as the children get older and is more noticeable in the girls which could suggest that puberty is starting to affect attitudes towards physical activity.



Theme 3: Fair is Fair

Another overarching theme that emerged throughout the responses was how fair sport is and the unequal opportunities there are for both boys and girls. There is evidence to suggest that there are not enough female role models exposed to children in primary school. As can be seen in both Figures 7 and 8, not one child could name a female sporting hero, but could name male sporting heroes. A series of pictures were presented to the children who go against the gender stereotypes of sport. Interestingly

enough, interview responses from the year 6 boys such as *“I guess girls can be just as strong as boys”* showed the boys coming to a realisation that girls can become successful athletes and can be just as good as boys. A comparison of the two charts shows that, similarly, the year 2 girls also had realisations including *“girls can box too?”* and *“that’s a girl football team?”* These realisations imply that there have not been enough representations of female athletes in physical education who can promote and sustain the love of sport in girls. This enhances the idea of gender being specified from a very young age.



Further analysis of the data showed that boy participants from year 6 reported that the gender stereotypes are set at a very young age for the children as *“dads in the families teach football to boys and mums teach dancing to girls.”* This can explain Figures 9-12 where girls and boys want to be gender specified athletes in the future. Although the evidence suggests that children are conforming to the gender stereotypes and norms of sport, comments from the interview from both ages and both genders suggest that it is *“fair”* and *“equal”* for boys and girls to participate in all sports because *“everybody should be treated the same way.”* While the children understand that it is fair for boys and girls to take part in all sports, there is a realisation that girls find it harder to find teams that are more boy dominated.

This was illustrated by Child F (girl) in year 6 who mentions that “*girls cannot find any [rugby] teams.*” This may answer the question as to why a year 2 girl wanted to be a rugby player in the future, but in year 6, the girls wanted to be more so athletes of female-specified sports. This finding may suggest that there is not gender equity in sport and as girls get older, there are increasingly less opportunities for them to take part in male dominated sports.

Figure 9 - Who would you most like to be in the future?
(Year 2 boys)

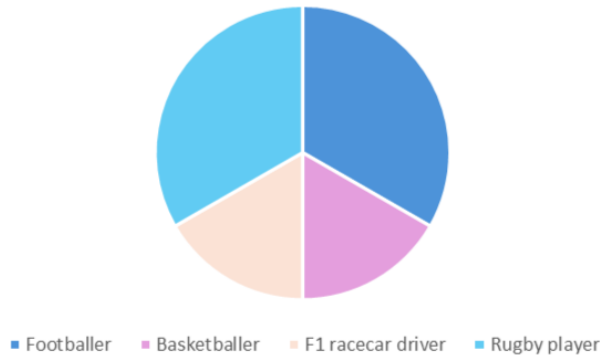


Figure 10 - Who would you most like to be in the future?
(Year 6 boys)

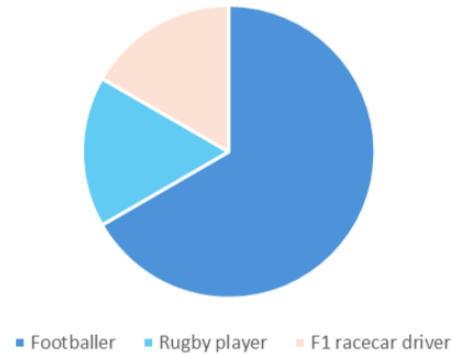
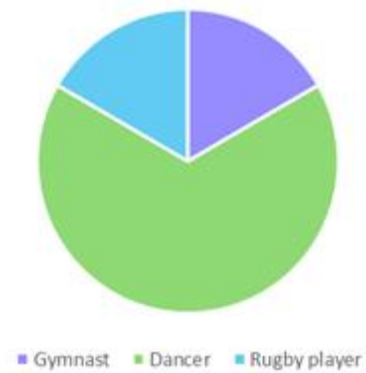


Figure 11 - Who would you most like to be in the future?
(Year 6 girls)



Figure 12 - Who would you most like to be in the future?
(Year 2 girls)



Discussion

Boys versus Girls

The main findings from this theme found that children are experiencing gender stereotypes in sport, thus affecting their sporting choices and attitudes (Parri and Ceciliani, 2019). It can be seen from the data that the boys' favourite sports are very male specific sports and the girls' favourite sports are very female specific sports, implying that gender stereotypes have influenced their choices. Comments from the interview including “*boys are stronger and are better at it [football]*” can support this. These findings are consistent with those found by Williams (2012) and Griggs and Petrie (2017) who show that more aggressive, dominant and assertive sports are being promoted to the boys. The girls, on the other hand,

are being steered towards the 'less physical' sports such as dancing, and gymnastics as these are promoted to them (Parri and Ceciliani, 2019). While there may be limitations of this approach, as the researcher makes no attempt to address the children's thoughts and experiences through interviews or questionnaires, Dowling (2006) and Cárcamo, Moreno and del Barrio (2020) can support this finding with the same ideas found through interviewing children to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and ideas. These findings may provide an explanation as to why the physical activities and sporting opportunities given to the children are heavily pervaded with sex-based roles (Gerdin, 2017; Drummond, 2019).

Prior studies from Castillo Andrés *et al.* (2012) observed how teachers adhere to gender stereotypes when using visuals in physical education and sport. Instead of this, teachers could challenge this issue by using individuals who go against gender stereotypes. These could be video clips from movies including 'Billy Elliot' (a young boy who was an aspiring ballet dancer) and 'Bend it like Beckham' which shows Jess Bhamra (an Indian girl from a traditional Hindi family) who was an aspiring footballer (Jakubowska and Byczkowska, 2018)

The data collected showed how attitudes towards gender in sports are apparent in the early stages of primary school but become more apparent in the last year of primary school. This can be seen from comments taken from the interviews where a year 2 boys suggested you "*might*" see girls playing football which gives the idea that you could see girls play football, but it does heavily remain a male specific sport. These attitudes can be seen to change as children reach year 6 with interview responses including "*boys are better because it [football] is more physical*" and that "*dads teach football and mums teach dancing.*" This is consistent when compared to wider research as Doherty and Brennan (2010) and Williams (2012) highlight that gender stereotypes are reinforced from a young age when, traditionally, the dads teach their boys football, and the mums would encourage their daughters to take dance classes.

Getting older

Turning now to the data collected which showed as children increase with age, the interest in and attitudes toward sport decreases; this becomes more apparent in girls. These findings correspond to the findings of With-Nielsen and Pfister (2011). Responses from the questionnaire revealed that all 6 year 2 girls showed that they 'love PE' and when the year 6 girls were interviewed only 1 loved PE and 4 thought PE was 'okay' because they do not like to get "*sweaty or muddy*" and the boys "*take it too seriously and are too aggressive*". Findings from a study conducted by Williams and Cliffe (2011) can explain this by suggesting that as children reach puberty, their attitudes can change. As this research is

quite old, this could call into question whether their findings are still reliable and relevant today. However, Duffey *et al.* (2021) and Youth Sport Trust (2023) can corroborate these findings as they show that when puberty takes place, girls' attitude towards sport begins to change. Consequently, these factors that inform children's attitudes are largely focused on how they look, their appearance, and their confidence (Williams and Cliffe, 2011; Griggs, 2015; Griggs and Petrie, 2017).

As mentioned in the literature review, attitudes do decline in boys, but these can be seen more in girls (Arabaci, 2009; Mercier *et al.*, 2017). Changes in the boys' attitudes can be seen in the questionnaire responses as all year 2 boys 'love PE' differing to the year 6 boys where only 4 boys 'love PE'. While the decline in the girls was due to their appearance, the changes of the boys were revealed in the interviews when they suggested they "*don't like doing gymnastics*". This finding could imply that girls are more exposed to changes to their body at this time of their life (Marttinen, Fredrick and Silverman, 2018) and that the boys are continuing to adhere to the gender stereotypes of female specific sports. While these findings are not surprising, it may be noted that the continuation of these stereotypes in sport could be an explanation as to how boys have not been exposed to role models who challenge these stereotypes; this can be seen in the discussion to follow.

Perhaps the most striking finding was that there was very little literature surrounding the question of how the attitude changes for boys as they get older. While there is ample evidence to suggest girls' attitudes to sport decreases with age, there was not near enough research and literature giving explanations to the change in boys' attitudes. Consequently, it can be said that there is a need for more research to be done in this field of enquiry.

Fair is Fair

One main theme that emerged throughout the data was how sport and sporting activities are, often, not equal and the opportunities they hold for both boys and girls are not fair. While some participants showed that it would be 'fair' and 'equal' to be treated the same way, it was evident that they were not treated the same way. This was noted in the interviews when a respondent came to a realisation and highlighted that "*girls can't find any rugby teams.*" This may be the cause of the decrease in male dominant sports in girls from year 2 to year 6 evident in the data. These findings are consistent to the foundations of a study conducted by Williams (2012) who found that there are far more opportunities for boys to take part in physical extra-curricular activities than girls. Additionally, those extra-curricular activities are often run by men with most of the children participating being boys (Williams, 2012). This could suggest that girls do not have equal opportunities to boys because the gender stereotypes that

teachers and young children perceive, fail to show gender equity in sport (Williams and Cliffe, 2011; Mansfield *et al.*, 2018).

Responses from the questionnaire found a year 2 girl wanting to be a rugby player in the future (which can be seen as a more male specific sport) but the year 6 girls conforming to the gender norms and wanting to be dancers and gymnasts. A study conducted by Lagestad, Ropo and Bratbakk (2021) may be able provide the possible answer to this, as the decrease in participation rates of gender specified sports often relate to the inclusion rates of girls. This calls for girls and boys to be offered equal opportunities in sports and sporting activities so that when children transition to secondary school, they are not disadvantaged by their sporting experience because of the gender separation (Williams, 2012). Ultimately, in the interview, the children were shown pictures of athletes who go against the gender stereotypes and who have been able to provide an equal opportunity, they came to a realisation that 'girls can box too' and 'girls can be as strong as the boys' and that 'boys can dance'. Consequently, it may be beneficial for teachers to go against the idea of separating genders and challenge gender stereotypes in PE because this effectively disadvantages the children (Raymond, 2005).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study shows how children's attitudes towards PE and sport change in accordance with gender and age. Based on the findings from the data, it was shown that the attitude towards physical activity and participation in sports heavily relies on gender stereotypes and gender norms that children are exposed to in their everyday life.

Although this research project is a small-scale study, findings can be seen to mirror and complement the ever-growing research of others. For instance, findings found in this research project found similarities in the qualitative research conducted by Cárcamo, Moreno and del Barrio (2020). Consequently, this research project can be deemed more valid because of its ability to replicate findings from this previous study (Kumar, 2019). Results from both studies highlighted gender differences which ultimately impacted children's attitudes to gender stereotypes in sport and how children stick to social norms. In synthesis with literature, this was prominent in the interviews where comments suggest the children adhere to these gender stereotypes and thus this is reflected in the activities and sports they participate in.

These findings cause future considerations for me, current teachers, and early career teachers coming into the profession. These findings can be transferred to other teachers and settings due to rich detail within the data and there is a high likelihood that if the study were conducted in a similar sized school, the findings would corroborate with this one (Anney, 2018). However, this study would not be

generalised to the wider population as the scale of the project is rather small. Despite having these limitations, schools, teachers and early career teachers can gain a valuable insight based on gender and how attitudes are being affected because of this. Further research is needed to identify strategies to break these norms, however, teachers could start with using more positive role models who challenge these gender stereotypes to approach their teaching of PE in a more inclusive way.

On the research topic, more research is needed to identify the changing attitudes to gender in sport as the children transition to secondary school. It is important to address that this small-scale case study was done in limited time due to this being the researchers final placement. However, in the future, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study, using different data collection methods, to track these children as they do transition to secondary school. Consequently, this future research could be used to enhance the robustness of the data.

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