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CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)

SPORTS COACHING

**A COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES SHOWN BY BOYS AND GIRLS IN KEY
STAGE 3 AND 4 TOWARDS PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of pedagogy)

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TOWARDS PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Physical inactivity and obesity is a major public health problem and it is vital that strategies are put in place to combat this trend. In order to prevent continuing health problems in children, this study aimed to identify the reasons for low levels of activity that are contributing to worrying levels of obesity. Comparing the attitudes of boys and girls in key stage 3 and 4 towards physical education was paramount in this study to gain an understanding of the factors influencing young people's activity levels.

For this study a single-case study design was adopted using focus groups as its source of data collection. A total of four focus groups were conducted, two in each key stage. The data analysis led to the emergence of three key themes; *Perceived competence and ability; Curriculum activities and Gender assumptions*. Overall students had moderately positive attitudes toward physical education, however attitudes significantly decline in KS4. Girls were increasingly affected by low perceived competence and gender assumptions which had significant influence on year ten girls participation. Boys were overall less affected by perceived competence and gender assumptions, even though enjoyment levels were slightly affected by these, participation remained high. All pupils wanted more variety in the curriculum as findings suggested by the time students reached year ten the repetitive nature of activities caused a lack of interest. Schools and physical educators need to ensure that the main emphasis within the lessons is on enjoyment and participation so that all students can participate within a non-threatening environment.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the years the link between regular physical activity (PA) and health has been widely documented (WHO, 2012). Despite the benefits of an active lifestyle, physical inactivity is a major public health problem. Furthermore there is growing concern on the PA levels of children with evidence of a gradual decline with age (Caudroit et al., 2012; Knowels et al., 2011). The Department of Health (2011) recommend children and young people aged 5-18 years engage in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity PA every day. The worry is that fewer children are meeting these guidelines causing higher risk of coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. Research suggests that physically active children are more likely to be active adults; as a result health educators have targeted school Physical education (PE) as a means of promoting healthy lifestyles (Sallis, et al., 1992).

PE is a foundation subject within the national curriculum. It is defined as a planned, progressive learning process that takes place within school curriculum time, set within the timetable delivered to all pupils. In order to combat the decline in PA recommendations have been made to increase physical activity in physical education programs, however any long term effects have been questioned. Age group 13-21 years is a great concern to the health profession as research has shown worrying levels of inactivity amongst people this age, especially girls. As a result of this decline PE programs have been under scrutiny as they may be contributing to the problem of the accelerating decline in PA as oppose to improving it.

It is the school and teachers responsibility to devise a suitable curricular program to inform and empower children to understand, create and employ an active and healthy lifestyle. Early adolescence is a key opportunity for young people to establish patterns and habits through PE to initiate and maintain a physically active life. In an attempt to combat the decline in PA understanding why this decline occurs more so for girls and with age is essential. This can be done by exploring and enquiring students' attitudes. Attitudes are born from beliefs that we have about people and things. They shape behaviours in numerous ways and determine our involvement in activities, the goals that we set and those we decide to abandon (Rikard and Banville, 2006). The purpose of such enquiry can identify factors that contribute to positive and negative feelings towards PE and how these feelings influence student

achievement. It is through this knowledge physical educators can create a learning environment that could promote PA and healthy lifestyles.

This study is qualitative based and aims to investigate, and compare the attitudes shown towards PE by boys and girls during Key stage 3 and Key stage 4, using pupils in year 8 and year 10. Furthermore, establishing an understanding of the various aspects of the PE program that appear to contribute to the positive and negative attitudes.

The main objectives are to identify:

1. What are the attitudes of KS3 and KS4 students towards physical education?
2. Do female and male student have similar or different attitudes toward physical education?
3. Do students in KS3 and KS4 show different attitudes towards physical education?
4. Does gender (feminine and masculine) have an impact on pupils beliefs about physical education and therefore attitudes?

The next chapter will include a review of previous and current literature. The third chapter will outline the methodological approach and procedure taken in this study. The fourth chapter discusses the findings of the study followed, finally by a conclusion.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF

LITERATURE

2.1 Physical Education And The National Curriculum

Physical education (PE) is a foundation subject within the national curriculum. It is defined as a planned, progressive learning process that takes place within school curriculum time, set within the timetable delivered to all pupils. This involves learning to move, becoming physically competent and through movement learn to gain understandings beyond physical activity, such as interaction and co-operating with others (AfPE Health Position Paper, 2008). “Physical education educates young people in and through the use and knowledge of the body and its movements, it is essentially a way of learning through action, awareness and observation” (National Curriculum for Physical Education [NCPE], 1992 p.5). Physical education aims to provide pupils with opportunities to develop physical competence and personal qualities, including self-esteem, self-confidence, tolerance, empathy and also allows them to appreciate the contribution physical education has on health and participation in physical activity throughout life (NCPE, 1992).

The Government has shown increasing interest in education policy. The main demonstration of this in Wales and England being the introduction of the Education Reform Act (ERA, 1988), which introduced major changes including the National Curriculum in 1988. The main purpose of the National Curriculum was to clearly and simply set a minimum entitlement for every child. The National Curriculum gives teachers, pupils, parents and employers a clear understanding of the skills and knowledge that pupils will gain at school (NCPE, 1999). The National Curriculum has been revised and reformed on several occasions, the most significant change for PE was the implementation of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) in 1992 (Cappel and Piotrowski, 2000). The implementation of the NCPE has had a substantial impact on reconstructing and developing the PE programme to what it is today (Maher, 2008)

The National Curriculum ensures progression in pupils learning and the progression through the school education phases. It provides a foundation for lifelong learning irrespective of social backgrounds, race, culture, gender, difference in ability and disability. The NC covers learners from age 5-16 years and is structured around key

stages and subjects (House of Commons N.C, 2009). Table 1 below represents the formations and compulsory activities for Key stage 3 and 4 in the PE national curriculum.

Table 1 – National Curriculum Key Stages (National Assembly for Wales, 2000)

	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Age	11-13	14-16
Year Group	7-9	10-11
Compulsory	Yes	Yes
Hours Per Week	2 Hours	2 hours
Programme of Study	Games Gymnastic Dance Swimming Athletics Outdoor and Adventurous Activity	Sport Dance Adventurous Activity Exercise Activities Health, Fitness and Well Being

At Key Stage 3 (KS3) learners build on the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired at KS2. KS3 encourages learners to build a platform of skills on which future activity choices can be made. Through their programme of study they plan, practise and improve their performance so that they can enjoy being able to perform consistently well. They also understand that engaging in activity is beneficial to their health and fitness and take greater responsibility for their own well-being (National Assembly for Wales, 2000)

At KS4 learners build on the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired at KS3. KS4 raises a growing sense of personal responsibility for a healthy and active lifestyle through developing activities that can be enjoyed and sustained in school and the community. Pupils will be taught to plan, perform and monitor a safe and effective health-related programme suited to personal needs and goals. (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)

The main aim of PE is said to be the development of pupils competence and confidence to take part in a range of physical activities that become a central part of their lives both in and out of school (Department of Education, 2012). However, recently more emphasis has been placed on the contribution PE has on lifelong participation in physical activity (PA). This has lead PE to be seen by some as “a means to achieving other ends” with the experience of learning PE being a vehicle to achieving desirable government aims and objectives (Shenton and Hepworth, 2004; Whitehead, 2000) such as health promotion, providing education for leisure and enforcing and providing the base for lifelong participation in PA (Capel and Piotrowski, 2000).

On the other hand there is a large body of literature to support the intrinsic benefits of PE. The evidence is particularly strong with regards to the development of children’s self- confidence and self-esteem through participating in PE regularly. Research suggests the development outcomes of PE can be understood in five domains; physical, lifestyle, affective, social and cognitive. There is strong evidence that PE has positive effects on anxiety, depression, tension, stress, energy and increases their understanding of fairness and responsibilities (Bailey, 2006). Other reported associations with regular PE include, enhancement of academic achievement, social and cognitive development and the contribution towards personality development and psychological wellbeing (Staiano and Calvert, 2011; Pate, 2011; Bailey *et al*, 2009; Bailey, 2006). PE has the potential to make significant contributions to the education and development of children and young people in many ways. The possible benefits for young people who take part in PE is immeasurable therefore with high levels of inactivity among young people it is essential to ensure participation in PE and PA increases.

2.2 Physical Activity Recommendations and Participation.

The decline in PA with age has been the most consistent finding in physical activity research (Caudroit *et al*, 2012; Knowels *et al*, 2011; Knuth and Hallal, 2009; Brown, 2009; Hardman, 2008). Many preventative and strategies have been put in place to create change such as Dragon Sports and 5x60 schemes which provide additional opportunities to participate in PA. However this trend is continuing, consequentially new recommendations have been published by The Department of Health (2011). The new recommendations focus on early years, children, young people, adults and older adults, creating more specific guidelines for people to follow. The Department of Health (2011) recommend children and young people aged 5-18 years to engage in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity PA every day. Nonetheless it is still frequently reported that people are not achieving the PA recommendations.

Due to the excessive amount of inactive and overweight people in the UK the government has set a target to get 70% of the population in Wales and England reasonably active by 2020. The reasoning behind this is to get the population healthier as an active life style is related to fewer coronary disease problems, obesity and diabetes, which will sequentially remove the enormous strain and money spent by the NHS. However, despite the proven health benefits of PA, sedentary lifestyles among adolescence, adults and older persons are prevalent with approximately 40% of males and females not participating in enough PA for any health benefits (WHO, 2010).

Adopting and maintaining a physically active life style should begin at a young age and carried on throughout adult life, however with PA levels in adolescence declining over the past two decades it is possible to see this is not happening (Duncan *et al*, 2008; Shephard and Trudeau, 2000; Sallis and McKenzie, 1991). A study by the British Heart Foundation (2012) found a significant decrease in PA participation after the age of ten with only 53% of boys and 35% of girls aged 11-16 achieving the recommended sixty minutes a day compared to the average 85% for boys and girls before the age of 10. School PE programmes offer the best opportunity to provide PA to children and young people, as it teaches them the skills and knowledge to build and sustain an active lifestyle. The link between PA and PE is essential as for many children and young people PE is the only place they engage in any PA

(Gratton and Jones, 2004; Gallahue and Donnelly, 2003). Therefore PE classes are considered a preeminent forum for promoting PA in young people (Pate et al, 2007) and lifelong participation throughout adult life. PE also has the foundations to increase and counteract the worrying decrease in girls' participation.

2.3 Gender Participation trends in Physical Education.

PE is one of the most gender segregated subject in school curriculum (Malcolm and Cobb, 1998) and consists of a variety of areas which over the years have become associated traditionally with pursuit by one gender to another. The main demonstration of this is the dominance of traditional and sex differentiated games in the curriculum. Certain characteristics and activities in the sport domain have traditionally been assigned to boys and others to girls which, based on their characteristics may be defined as masculine or feminine (Klomsten *et al*, 2005). Masculinity and femininity is a performed gender identity and is not the same as an individual's sex. The contents and practice of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and are reinforced and reproduced through daily interactions and social activity, which play a significant role in the development of beliefs and attitudes of young people.

Boys participate in football and rugby which have long been perceived as masculine sports within the PE curriculum, whilst girls participate in 'feminine' sports such as hockey, netball and gymnastics (Klomsten *et al*, 2004; Fasting, 2003; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002; Koivula, 2001). The on-going trends of these sports in schools reinforce the patterns of sex differentiated provision of experience in PE. More significantly, these gender differences are the result of generally held stereotype images of boys and girls (Gill, 2002). Gender stereotypes are constructed on gender attributes, roles of individuals and differences. Stereotyping is when people automatically apply assumptions about people's personal characteristics and social behaviours. Stereotypes are formed from adults, parents, teachers, peers and more significantly the media (Waddington *et al*. 1998). Stereotyping within the sporting context is very common with different sports regarded as either masculine or feminine. Sports regarded as masculine frequently consist of danger, risk, violence, speed, strength, endurance, challenge, and team spirit characteristics (Koivula,

2001). Feminine sports on the other hand consist of gracefulness, elegance and non-aggressive traits. The dangers of gender stereotyping within a sport context is the on-going effect it has on young people's participation in PE and their reluctance to participate in sports deemed non-feminine or non-masculine.

The implications of gender segregation in schools are that boys and girls will conform to the expected 'norms' within the sporting domain and will only participate in the activities they consider gender appropriate. In addition Dwyer *et al.* (2006) reinforced these findings, and identified that girls and boys who perceive activities to go against the gender stereotypes are more likely to withdraw from participating in those activities due to fear of ridicule from their peers. As a result it is important to consider when and how gender differences become disadvantages that threaten to undermine opportunities for all individuals. Hills and Croston (2012) supported this in a study which found that gender specific sports and activities in the school curriculum become a disadvantage in terms of limiting the learning opportunities of pupils. In support of this, physical educators have reported to find it increasingly difficult to provide equal and specific learning situations for every individual because both genders are contracted to different and often separate activities and games. When such statements are made it is essential to consider the impact it is having on participation in PE.

The significant difference in boys and girls participation identifies the possible impact gender and segregation has during secondary school. A great deal of literature and health statistics found that girls participation rates are significantly lower than boys throughout secondary school. A study carried out by Kjonniksen *et al.* (2009) found that participation rates in school PE significantly declines from age 13-16 years. Boys participation declines slightly during this period, however there is a more prominent decline in girls. Biddle *et al.* (2005) found that 61% of girl's aged 8-11 participated in two hours of PE a week which declined to just 46% at the age of fifteen. In contrast boys' participation in PE stays relatively stable throughout school; this is suggested to be because of the perceived association between PE and PA. Another possible explanation for this is the male dominance in sport and the social expectations placed on boys to be good at sport.

The considerable difference in boys and girls participation forges the link between the surrounding issues as to whether gender is one of the key issues in the decline of participation. If so what attitudes do boys and girls possess that creates such a distinct difference in participation. It is essential that an understanding of the attitudes held by students is gained in order to improve the experience and quality of PE.

2.4 The Measurement of Attitudes

In an educational setting it is essential to identify and understand how certain factors influence and affect student learning and achievement. One key influence reported in a range of education research is attitudes (Perry and Pauletti, 2011; Constantinou *et al*, 2009; Siegel, 2007; Rikard and Banville, 2007; Silverman and Subramaniam, 1999). It is through knowledge of pupils attitudes that educators can create a positive and enjoyable learning experience. An attitude is defined as a relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005). Attitudes shape behaviour in countless ways. The first determinant of an attitude is the individuals' positive or negative evaluations for performing the behaviour (Rikard and Banville, 2007). Positive or negative beliefs will display favourable or unfavourable attitudes toward the object, however the intensity can vary.

Attitudes are formed and described in terms of three components; affective, cognitive and behaviour. When measuring attitudes all three components are fundamental to understanding and highlight the key elements that affect and construct attitudes. The **affective** component involves a person's feelings and emotions toward an object, person, issue or event. The affective component is essentially the foundation where beliefs and behaviours develop. The **cognitive** component involves a person's beliefs, thoughts and knowledge about the subject. Beliefs are essential to understand attitudes as they represent what the individual has learnt through experience. The third component is the **behaviour**-based component which represents how attitudes influence a person's behaviour. One key determinant of how behaviour-based component is expressed is 'behaviour intentions'; which is an

individual's intentions for performing certain behaviours as a result of social roles and social norms (McLeod, 2009).

Once attitudes are developed they can be evaluated at two levels; Explicit and implicit. Explicit attitudes are consciously endorsed and easily reported, whereas implicit attitudes are involuntary, uncontrollable and sometimes unconscious. Attitudes are originated from genetic backgrounds and social experiences. All attitudes have three components however any given attitude can be based more so on one component than another (Aronson *et al.* 2010). Attitude researchers have traditionally viewed attitudes as a single-component, two-component or a multi-component.

The use of single-component research is often used in physical education research which consists of the affective component only. This however has been suggested by Constantinou *et al.* (2009) to restrict finding as results will only represent one part of an attitude, therefore limiting our understanding to why the attitudes are formed initially. Other studies have used affective, cognitive and behaviour components for research as they usually link as a multi-component. However, there is evidence to suggest that the affective and cognitive components that dictate behaviour are not always consistent with the displayed behaviour. Recent research has found that sometimes peoples behaviours do not correspond with their attitudes and are more likely to behave according to their attitudes under certain conditions such as; when expecting a favourable outcome or when they stand to lose or win something. In a school setting behaviour is more likely to be influenced by situational and social factors. Due to the inconsistent relationship between the two components and behaviour there are doubts about the efficiency of the multi-component view of measuring attitude, consequently the use of the two-component which consists of affective and cognitive is found to be a more realistic evaluation of an attitude. The two-component construct has not necessarily been the most commonly used construct in attitude research however it has been found to be the most effective.

2.5 Attitudes and Physical Education

Attitudes are an integral part of people's everyday life, constantly impacting decisions and thoughts in different ways (Phillips and Silverman, 2012). One area where attitude is predominantly important is PE. Research has found that if positive attitudes are exhibited or formed towards PE the probability of the individual exhibiting a positive attitude towards PA is increased. Given the level of inactivity among youth McKenzie (2003) states that the formation of positive attitudes toward PA in PE is essential. PE has been recognised for its pivotal role in efforts to address the inactivity in youth by impacting pupils attitudes and intentions to participate in PA (Hagger *et al.* 2002; McKenzie *et al.* 2001). In addition PE has been found to have the potential to reach the majority of children and young people and therefore holds a responsibility for providing the foundations for individuals to build positive attitudes toward PA.

Given the immeasurable link between PE and PA it is essential to understand how positive attitudes toward PA and PE can affect other aspects of life. For example there is emerging evidence to suggest that students who exhibit more positive attitudes towards PE are more likely to participate in PA outside of school (McKenzie, 2003). Furthermore Subramaniam and Silverman (1999) found that positive attitudes formed towards PE can play an important role in encouraging youth to maintain an active life therefore likely to become an active adult. The need to examine and respond to students attitudes is especially important in secondary school. Emerging evidence suggests that school PE is the logical first step in encouraging and helping students participate in PA both now and in the future (Subramaniam and silverman, 2007).

Due to the varied experience of PE the research of attitudes has been introduced in order to understand the attitudes possessed by children and the influence attitudes have on participation. A study by Briddle and Mutrie (2001) found that attitudes towards PE may change during school years with significant evidence of a decline in positive attitudes at the age of thirteen. As a result of these findings attitudes have been found to be one of the key influences in the declining participation levels of adolescence.

Children and young people display different attitudes toward PE. This may be attributed to previous experiences in PE based on their beliefs and feelings towards the subject. Recent studies have found that for many PE is an enjoyable learning experience, however for some it can be an unpleasant ordeal (Macfadyn, 1999). The consequences of these experiences whether gained in primary or secondary school have significant impact on the individual's affective and cognitive components of attitude therefore shaping a positive or negative attitude toward PE (Chung and Philips, 2002; Greenwood and Skillwell, 2001).

Studies have investigated students' attitudes in relation to age and have found that attitudes are less positive as they reach adolescence. A study carried out by Pano and Markola (2011) investigating the attitudes of 14-18 year old children towards extracurricular PA. The study recognised that the factors affecting children's attitudes towards PA and PE are similar and complex. The study also found that attitudes are mediated by a range of variables such as social class, gender, race, body image and physical identity. This was echoed in a research project by Dismore and Baily (2010) where they additionally found that the curriculum, teacher and perceived competence also had a significant impact on children's attitudes.

2.6 Gender and Attitudes.

The area of gender receives a great deal of attention when considering attitude formation, however recent research is greatly focused on girls' attitudes toward PE. The more prominent decline in girls' participation implies they hold different attitudes to boys. Findings from Daigle's (2003) study found that boys have more positive attitude towards PE than girls and that girls were twice as likely to miss PE lessons compared to boys, this suggests that girls hold more unfavourable attitudes toward PE. In addition Milosevic (1996) found that a significant majority of girls hold negative attitudes toward PE, distinct biological differences appear to be a key influence on girls' attitudes, in contrast boys' biological differences do not appear to affect attitudes. Within the literature on 'gender' sex is identified with biological differences between men and women and gender with social/non-biological issues that are typically associated with talk of 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities, personal characteristics and social behaviours (Bridle and Mutrie, 2001). Findings from

Wersch *et al.* (1992) study found that as girls become older the lack of academic results was linked in loss of interest. In contrast a positive attitude was maintained by boys throughout school because of the perceived association between PE and PA.

It is essential to consider and acknowledge the potential influences of social expectations on behaviour (Butt *et al.* 2011; Perry and Pauletti, 2011; Klomsten *et al.* 2005). A key factor in the behaviour differences of boys and girls is said to be the pre-existing beliefs held about femininity and masculinity and the socially constructed assumptions associated with them. Gender-related perceptions and actions have a big influence in students participation in PE. A key finding in PE literature is that boys' participation remains consistently high throughout secondary school (Perry and Pauletti, 2011). Sociologists have long argued that the reasoning for this being the perceived social concept that sports and PE reinforces and demonstrates masculinity. The pre-existing beliefs held and associated with PE and masculinity affect the cognitive component of an attitude, therefore because boys are exposed to such beliefs from a young age the likelihood of them having positive attitudes towards PE is high. On the other hand girl's beliefs about PE are very different. Like boys, girls have a perceived image and set of characteristics they believe they should follow and display in order to be feminine, but unlike boys, PE and sport threatens this and for many girls the only option is to conform to social norms. When considering the impact gender has on participation it is essential to understand whether social-norms impact students' beliefs and thoughts which may in turn create negative attitudes which then get applied to PE. It is the beliefs about gender and sex which informs their beliefs about PE and PA which then dictates their attitudes and therefore their decisions to take part in PE.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

3.1 Significance of the Study

Through investigating pupils' attitudes towards PE, teachers can be informed on what influences positive and negative attitudes. From the study's findings, participation in both PA and PE can be increased by adopting teaching practices and curriculum structure. PE is a key aspect in decreasing childhood obesity and creating the foundations for lifelong participation in PA therefore an essential area to investigate and promote positive attitudes.

3.2 Methodology: Qualitative Research

An essential consideration for research is the consistency between the research problem and the strategies chosen to address the question (Saunders *at al.* 2003). Determining the method and source most appropriate for generating the kind of data needed to address the research question is an essential and logical way of deciding a method (Mason, 2002). Therefore the features of qualitative research will be outlined in order to demonstrate the appropriateness of the method for this study.

Through qualitative research we can explore a wide range of dimensions in the social world by enquiring peoples words and actions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) and explore everyday life, the understanding and the experiences of our research participants (Mason, 2002). Consequently we can gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviours, actions, decisions and beliefs. In light of this, qualitative research seems particularly appropriate in order to understand and determine students attitudes (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

Qualitative research is a method that is essential for understanding the why and how of decision making (Silverman, 2006). Importantly, however, this method can uncover in-depth information about peoples life experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings in a way other methods could not (Mason, 2002). This suggests that qualitative research is best suited towards generating truth claims and attitudes in respect to certain phenomena. Attitudes are very complex and are affected by many things, therefore a qualitative study allows the researcher to explore all three

components of the students attitudes in detail, with the facility to find out why certain attitudes are present (Prusak *et al.*, 2004; Eccles and Harold, 1991).

3.3 Focus Groups

The chosen qualitative research method for this study was focus groups. The research aimed to investigate the attitudes of secondary school students towards PE. It is argued that focus groups are the best method for drawing upon respondent's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be possible in other methods such as interviews (Flick, 2007; Patton, 2002; Gibbs and Leinbach, 1996). This is because the key element is interaction between participants in order for them to stimulate the debate on issues and opinions they have.

Using focus groups to collect data on student's attitudes allows the researcher to gain deeper meaning, and understanding towards the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the individuals (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010). Focus groups were chosen with the main objective of bringing people's attitudes and beliefs to life in an environment where there was opportunities to explore certain responses in more detail and elicit information in a way which allows the research to find out why an issue is salient (Gibbs and Leinbach, 1996), as well as illuminating the differences in perspective between groups of individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Kitzinger, 1995). The discovery of how different groups think and feel about topics and why they hold certain opinions is a key requirement for the study as it allows the researcher to compare the different views of both girls and boys and KS3 and KS4.

3.4 Participants/Sample

For the sample a large mixed comprehensive school in Rhondda Cynon Taff with students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds was chosen. This school was selected as it was within an accessible area for the researcher and because the researcher is a volunteer at the school on a weekly basis, therefore rapport was already established with the pupils.

The participants chosen needed to represent KS3 and KS4, therefore pupils from yr8 and 10 were chosen for this study. All participants chosen will have experience in

core, BTEC or GCSE PE lessons on a weekly basis. Girls and boys in yr8 were selected as this is the age (11-13) where participation in PE remains high. Yr8 pupils were selected to represent KS3 as opposed to yr7 because they would have now settled into comprehensive school routines and subjects. Year ten (yr10) pupils were selected to compare the pupils' attitudes because in contrast to yr8, this is the age where participation in PA is at its lowest (Knuth and Hallal, 2009; Brown, 2009; Hardman, 2008; Caudroit *et al*, 2012; Knowels *et al*, 2011). Girls and boys in yr10 were selected to represent KS4 as opposed to yr11 as they had fewer time constraints due to not being in their final year of GCSCs.

In each year group two focus groups were conducted, consisting of 5-8 pupils in each of either all boys or all girls. The selection of participants for this study was based on their involvement in PE. The participants were selected to fit into 3 categories; pupils *who frequently fail to engage in PE; those who frequently engage in PE lessons and those undertaking a GCSE or BTEC PE course*. In each focus group two students with the help of the PE teachers will be chosen to represent each category. Mason (2002) suggested that in each focus group it is important to have varying experiences and perspectives in order to allow for some debate or difference in opinion. A stratified sampling method was undertaken, all students from yr8 and 10 was stratified (a group within the population) into three categories, and for each focus group two students were chosen at random from each 'strata' in order to create a proportional representation of the year group.

3.5 Ethics

Contact with the head teacher was made as consent was initially required from the school in which the study would take place (appendix A). As the population being used were under the age of eighteen they could not legally give informed consent, therefore consent has to be granted by both them and their parents or guardians before participating in the study. After contacting and meeting with the head teacher, the researcher was informed that individual parental permission to take part was not necessary as the school already had a covering procedure for this type of activity in place. As a result of this only assent forms were distributed to all participants prior to the day of the focus group; forms had to be signed and returned before or on the day

of the study. Parent consent forms and information sheets were prepared prior to the meeting with the head teacher (appendix B and E). In order to ensure all participants and understood the aim and process of the study information sheets were also provided detailing the aims, the process, what was being asked of them and their freedom to withdraw at any time.

3.6 Pilot Study/ Modification

Prior to the commencement of the study a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study was carried out with four year eight (yr8) girls from the secondary school in which the research would take place. Fewer participants were used than those to be included in the full study. Lancaster *et al.* (2004) states a smaller experiment is designed to test logistics and gather information prior to a larger study, in order to improve the quality and efficiency of the actual focus groups. The purpose of the session was to become familiar with the process and ensure that the questions were appropriate to generate efficient interactions and answers in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study. The pilot study also allows the researcher to alter any unnecessary or ineffective question before the actual focus groups are conducted. Several questions were modified from closed to open questions allowing for more detailed responses. It became clear from the pilot study that the researcher would have to facilitate the beginning of the discussions to generate the type of answers needed for the study.

3.7 School procedure

A letter was initially sent to the head teacher asking for permission to conduct the study at the school. Once permission was granted discussion with the PE teachers began and the required participants were chosen to represent the three categories. The selected students were then approached during PE lessons and asked to participate in the study. The participants who agreed to take part were given an assent form (appendix C) and parent/guardian (appendix E) and participant (appendix F) information sheets. Participants were informed that if the assent forms were not signed and returned before or on the day of the focus group they were unable to participate. The focus groups were organised to take place in the PE classroom at lunch time for every group. Before the pupils arrived the tables were set

into a circle and the Dictaphone was tested and in place ready to commence the focus group. Before proceeding participants understanding was checked and participants were also made aware of their freedom to withdraw at any point without any consequences. The students were informed that any information given would be held within the strictest of confidence, and that their name would not be used in any notes or in the final report. Once the focus groups ended all participants were thanked. Each focus group lasted 20-30 minutes. On completion of all focus groups the recordings were transcribed and analysed.

3.8 Data analysis.

Following the completion of the focus groups the voice recordings were transcribed. This stage was followed by familiarisation with the data, which was achieved by listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts several times. This allowed the researcher to identify key meanings and themes in large amounts of data. When reviewing the transcripts the researcher was seeking to establish the thoughts and feelings of the students. During the reviewing process the researcher read and re-read the transcripts identifying reoccurring topics and themes (Kinchin, 2004). From this process meaningful quotes were identified; quotes which were considered to have similar meanings and give evidence to the findings we recorded and put into themes.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF

FINDINGS

4.1 Perceived competence and Ability.

Perceived competence refers to one's beliefs about his or her ability and was identified as the strongest predictor of PE class enjoyment and positive attitudes in this study. Children's perceptions of their competence and enjoyment in PE are linked strongly with their attitudes towards the subject.

The findings of this study highlight the impact perceived competence in PE has on attitudes. Participants were asked "on a scale of 1-10 with one being poor and 10 being excellent where would you put yourself in terms of ability?" All participants who earlier stated that they disliked or did not enjoy PE put themselves low on the scale of ability. Another key finding was girls have lower perceived physical ability than boys, and that boys had higher perceptions of their competence in PE, this is in accordance with other studies (Prochaska *et al.*, 2003; Butcher and Hall, 1983; Schempp *et al.*, 1983). In addition perceived competence affects girls' participation significantly more than boys in KS4.

An individual's perceived competence has a significant impact on enjoyment, which ultimately dictates attitudes. The students were asked to imagine themselves at a different ability level in order to establish the extent a change in ability would have. Those with low perceived competence were to think of themselves as above average in terms of ability and those with high perceived competence as below average. It was evident from the discussion that ability had an impact on all students especially girls. The responses were similar for both yr8 and 10 girls, those with low perceived competence had similar responses about the way they would view PE if they had higher perceived competence.

[YR8 G] C: I would participate more because I know I could do it and half the time I end up getting it wrong because of just how rubbish I am at sport. I tend to just make a, just stop and just stand there in the corner with my arms folded thinking, I've just made a fool of myself.

[YR8 G] B: I'm just so clumsy

[YR10 G] A: I would feel better about myself when I'm in the lessons.

All girls said they would think of PE more positively if they were better, forming the conclusion that ability has become a barrier to their participation. The response of those with high perceived competence in yr10 was most interesting; the results identified the significance students hold towards ability. Their response gives us an insight to how they perceive the less able in PE lessons. Both boys and girls in yr10 held similar views about the affect poor competence level would have on their engagement.

[YR10 G] B: I think if I was lower you wouldn't be as good as everyone else so you wouldn't want to do it.

[YR10 G] C: It would make me feel that everyone else is better than me and it would make me feel like what's the point.

[YR10 B] D: I wouldn't feel confident in doing it.

In comparison to yr10, yr8 students with high perceived competence had a different outlook on competence levels and its effect, and alleged they would still participate in lessons. Students with high perceived competence believed their ability would not make any difference to their participation however it may impact their enjoyment.

[YR8 B] A: I would still try my best.

[YR8 G] D: I think I'd just be a bit more wary of what I was doing.

These findings identify yet again the effect on yr10 students is greater than yr8, providing yet another explanation for the negative attitudes displayed in yr10. All but yr8 students with high perceived competence believe their desire and motivation to learn and engage in PE is affected by ability.

A significant correlation between ability and activities was evident when discussing the activities they disliked. In both KS3 and KS4 both genders named a variety of activities they did not like, the general reasoning for disliking an activity was their low perceived competence within that activity. This was the result for both students with high and low perceived competence. Similarly Standage *et al.* (2003) reported that people avoid activities they believe exceed their ability and coping capabilities, however, they will undertake and perform assuredly activities they judge themselves capable of managing.

During the school year pupils undertake a variety of different activities, in relation to this Subramaniam and Silverman (1999) identified that attitude toward PE can sometime fluctuate throughout the school year. Findings in this study suggest perceived competence within certain activities could cause this. The activities students disliked varied from gymnastics, cricket and football for boys and swimming and running for girls. For the majority of students the reasoning for disliking an activity was low perceived competence.

[YR10 B] D: Mr Jones always throws the ball at you if you're not good.

[YR 10 B] B: I've never been good at it people just take the mikey so i don't try

[YR10 B] F: I'm just not that good at cricket.

[YR10 G] A: I'm always last.

[YR10 G] E: I've never been good at running, and when everyone is running past you because you're slow its horrible.

[YR8 G] C: The reason I don't like running is because in year 7 I used to run and I was always last. It was horrible and sometimes it was raining.

[YR8 B] B: And I can't do all the shapes.

This can be reinforced by drawing on the work of Bell (1997) who found, when overwhelmed with difficulties individuals who have doubts about their capabilities slacken their efforts or give up altogether, whereas those who have a strong sense of efficacy exert greater effort to master the challenges. There is strong correlation between boys and girls when considering ability and activities, however girls tend to participate less or disengage in those activities. In some studies, researchers have reported that girls perform as well as boys in various types of physical activity but still report lower perceptions of ability, particularly as they get older (Pajares and Johnson, 1996; Pajares and Miller, 1994). The findings of this study appear to confirm Weidongs (2011) findings which reported that perceptions of competence are reflected on and used to decide whether to participate in an activity or not. Children generally chose to engage in activities that they perceived themselves competent.

The most noteworthy finding is that ability and perceived competence affects everyone in some shape or form and some more than others. The key concept here is differentiating between student enjoyment and participation. The way in which different age groups and gender face these challenges essentially dictate their participation levels.

On the surface ability and perceived competence seemed to have little effect on yr8 boys, overall all boys put themselves high in terms of ability but it became evident that a minority of the boys did not enjoy all aspects of PE. However the key finding from this information was that these individuals still participated in all lessons, their level of enjoyment and competence did not impact their desire to take part in PE. Similarly to yr8 boys, yr10 boys lack of enjoyment did not necessarily effect participation, it is important to note that many of the boys in yr10 had low perceived competence level and therefore did not enjoy PE.

This can be reinforced by drawing on a key conversation in the discussion; a boy in the focus group reported being poor at football and as a result the boys were laughing and saying “he just floats around the pitch”. This boy however still continues to participate in lessons, maybe for reasons discusses in the gender theme. These findings suggest boys perceived competence does essentially affect their enjoyment, but not their participation.

In comparison to boys, perceived competence and ability has a greater effect on girls. Four yr8 girls placed themselves under 6 on the scale of 1-10 in terms of ability. However, surprisingly when asked “Do you always participate?” all responded “Yes” with very expressive nods. Similar to boys in yr8, girls perceived competence seems to have little effect on participation. Throughout the focus groups it was apparent that two of the girls had very poor perceived competence and did not enjoy their time during PE lessons, yet surprisingly they still continue to participate PE lessons on a weekly basis. Reasons for this could be that the pressure to be good at PE is not as significant in the early years of secondary school.

[YR8 G] C: Ye I always get too cold I can't do it.

[YR8 G] B: Yeah it gets too cold or I end up hurting.

YR8 G] C: I would participate more because I know I could do it and half the time I end up getting it wrong because of just how rubbish I am at sport. I tend to just make a, just stop and just stand there in the corner with my arms folded thinking, I've just made a fool of myself.

Consistent with other research ability and perceived competence seems to have little effect on participation in yr8 which may explain why participation rates are still high at this age (Carroll and Loumidis, 2001; Cairney, 2012) A worrying issue however is that girls who have low perceived competence in yr8 will slowly begin to disengage. Carney *et al.* (2003) study found girls who began school with lower levels of PE enjoyment and competence continued to decline further over time. These findings are consistent with this study's findings as girls in yr10 who have always had low perceived competence display negative attitudes toward PE.

Enjoyment and perceived competences has the greatest affect on yr10 girls with those with low perceived competence viewing PE as a chore or unpleasant experience. In comparison to yr8 girls those with low perceived competence will not take part and even avoid participation in any kind of PE. From these finding it is possible to assume that ability has become significantly more important in yr10. The main reason for the adolescence girls decline is the option to opt out of GCSE PE. Carney *et al.* (2003) study suggested that girls believed they had to have a good level of ability to continue in GCSE PE. With girls having overall lower levels of competence than boys it is no surprise that the decline is more prominent for girls.

The general conclusion is that when individuals feel competent that they can be successful at a particular task, they are more likely to choose to do the task and maintain their effort, even under adverse conditions (Wigfield *et al.*, 1999). If an individual's perceived competence is not likely to change due to their lack of sporting ability, changing the focus of PE could benefit all students. In addition if children perceive their physical abilities to be fixed and not amenable through practice, it is unlikely that enjoyment will be increased in PE settings. Adapting PE so that it is not competitive and based on winning, and make an environment that has other focuses such as fun, team work and getting healthy may allow some student to hold different meanings to PE, which ultimately create a more enjoyable experience for those with low perceived competence.

4.2 Activities

Students in yr10 experienced less enjoyment in comparison to yr8. One possible explanation for this is the repetition of activities every year in the PE curriculum. Secondary school PE programmes have been under scrutiny for some time in relation to the curriculum content and its delivery (Locke, 1992; Siedentop, 1992; Kinchin and O'Sullivan, 2003). Numerous initiatives for curriculum change have promoted ways to meet the changing needs and interests of secondary school students.

Findings from this study confirm previous findings of other studies investigating student attitudes in relation to age; a key identification was the decline in the affective component (feeling and emotions toward something) of attitude with age (Portman, 1995; Biddle and Chatzisarantis, 1999; Biddle and Goudas, 1996; Wersch *et al.*, 1992; Biddle and Mutrie, 2001). As previously stated a possible explanation for this decline is the repetition of activities in PE. Findings suggest by the time students reach yr10 the repetitive nature of activities causes a lack of interest or for some the repetition of an activity they dislike. Silverman and Subramaniam (2007) similarly found that pupils get bored of participating in the same activities within PE classes in the first three years of school. Yr8 student's responded positively about the majority of activities; however a sign of negative attitudes being formed as a consequence of activity repetition is evident;

[YR 8 G] A: We got to do running all the time, does my head in, without stopping.

[YR8 G] A: Yeah six weeks of it.

[YR8 G] B: We did it all through year seven and most of this term!

[YR8 G] D: We do it at the start of every year.

A significant finding from the yr10 girl's focus groups was the attitude change two of the core PE students had. Throughout school they very much disliked PE, however their attitudes are now positive due to the change in lesson activities. Once a student opts out of GCSE PE, they are only required to undertake core PE which is aimed at getting them active as opposed to competitive. Lessons consist of games such as

bench ball, volley ball and rounder's. The introduction of new and fun activities has altered their perspective on PE.

[YR10 G] D: I never really used to but it's got better.

[YR10 G] D: I like it more now because we do more stuff.

[YR10 G] A: Yes like before we just did the same stuff all the time.

Consistent with Rikard and Banvilles (2007) findings, this study also found students wanted more variety in the curriculum activities, more input, and more interesting activities to participate in. However, Siedentop (2004) argues that a multi-activity curriculum with a series of short-term units covering a wide variety of activities to be a major factor influencing negative students' attitudes toward PE. It appears that the students *who frequently fail to engage* lack the confidence and motivation to participate. One plausible explanation is the current structure of the PE curriculum. In essence, this curriculum lessens students' opportunities to master any one activity in such a short time period. Students therefore do not get to master the skills and knowledge necessary to fully engage in such activities, the result of this: poor confidence, poor perceived competence, little motivation and a negative attitude (Siedentop, 2004).

Similar to findings from McKenzie *et al.* (1994), the participants displayed a much greater liking for game play compared with fitness activities. Girls in both year groups exhibit negative thoughts and attitudes towards fitness activities. Like Tannehill and Zakrajsek (1993) the participants stated their greatest reason for disliking fitness activities as being due to the limited and dull choices of running activities. The majority of girls said they dislike running as most of their fitness lessons involved continuous running around the field.

[YR8 G] A: We got to do running all the time, does my head in, without stopping.

[YR8 G] C: I can agree with you I don't like running.

[YR8 G] B: Running's really boring.

[YR8 G] All: Yeah we all hate running.

[YR10 G] D: It's tiring.

[YR10 G] A: Ye do so many laps!

In comparison to girls the majority of boys stated that they enjoyed the challenge of running and fitness, however, it did get boring after a couple of weeks. Carlson (1995) found students become bored as a result of a lack of challenge when teachers use the same activities and sports every year. Participants in this school stated that they begin every school year with running and continue to do the same activity for six weeks. Carlson (1995) found performing the same games and sports as one of the contributing factors for their lack of interest in the subject matter, beginning the school year with fitness does not encourage positive attitudes, it conflictingly builds foundations for poor attitudes at the start of every year.

In physical education, gaining insight into student beliefs is a critical source for understanding their attitudes and their interests and involvement toward the curriculum (Strand and Scantling, 1994). To understand student beliefs the theory of reasoned intention by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) will be used. This theory suggests that people tend to engage in a behaviour that they evaluate as positive and when others view it similarly, however worryingly, the majority of students believe the activities taught in lessons have no significance in life with the exception that they want a career in sport. All students were asked the benefits of PE, surprisingly the only response both girls and boys gave was fitness, however, worryingly when asked if it helped with anything else neither could suggest any.

[YR8 G]Most: Not really

[YR8 G]E: Unless you want to be a PE teacher

The significance an individual holds towards a subject is key in developing positive attitudes, if students have no real connection with what they are doing in life the likelihood of negative attitude is increased. This can be reinforced by drawing on the work of Brunton *et al.* (2003) who suggested that adolescents may not perceive PA as a priority and have other, sedentary activities to participate in, therefore do not have the time to be physically active. Consistent with previous studies, the findings of this study has identified the significant impact activities have on participation. The repetitive nature of activities throughout year 7, 8, and 9 appear to be a key cause in

decreased participation. PE teachers who assume that the same types of games and activities bring similar levels of enjoyment to students regardless of their age may need to rethink their curriculum. Students in KS4 need to be provided with activities that arouse their intention to explore (Chen *et al.*, 1999).

4.3. Gender Assumptions

Findings of this studies investigation supports past research, which has found that boys and girls differ in attitudes. Findings suggest that once physical education becomes optional, enrolment tends to decrease significantly, with the decrease more noticeable with adolescent girls than boys (Hill and Cleven, 2005). Other studies on student attitude have reported gender to be an influencing variable on attitude (Biddle, 1996; Birtwhistle and Brodie, 1991; Chung and Phillips, 2002; Colley *et al.*, 1994; Folsom-Meek, 1992; Greenwood and Stillwell, 2001; Hicks *et al.*, 2001; Luke and Sinclair, 1991)

Controversially our society has expectations about appropriate behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and values for males and females. The resulting sex-role stereotyping has profound impact on students' participation in, and attitudes towards PA and sport. In the literature on 'gender' sex is to be identified with biological differences between men and women and gender with social/non-biological issues that are typically associated with talk of 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities. Gender stereotypes are people's beliefs about how the sexes differ or should differ and the common assumption is that all girls and women have a set of characteristics which is constant and common to them as females, and which is distinctly different from the set of characteristics common to males. These gender stereotypes are affecting individuals' social perception, social behaviour, reactions to one's own and to others' behaviour, interests, values, and self-perceived competencies (Ruble *et al.*, 2002). As a result of these stereotypes certain characteristics and activities in the sport domain have traditionally been assigned to boys or girls; in essence some sports have been defined as either having masculine or feminine characteristics and traits.

Participant responses identified that boys and especially girls have traditional opinions about feminine and masculine sport activities. Participants were asked to

'name activities you associate with boys' and to repeat for girls. Both yr8 and ten boys names traditional sports associated with males and females.

[YR8 B] B: Rugby.

[YR8 B] A: Netball.

[YR8 B] D: Football.

[YR10 B]: D: Dance.

[YR8 10] D: Cricket

[YR10 B]: C: Hockey

Unsurprisingly the girl's responses were identical to that of the boys. They also named activities such as boxing and basketball for boys and gymnastics, swimming and trampolining for girls. The participants' responses were all in accordance with gender stereotyping, however, interestingly all activities named were those included in the PE curriculum this identifying the considerable role that PE has in reinforcing these stereotypes in schools (Klomsten *et al.*, 2005).

Apart from the obvious link between the PE curriculum and the activities chosen, the participants were asked to discuss why they had chosen these activities for each gender. Here are some of the reasons;

Table.2 Participants reasons for gendered activities.

Boys	Girls
C: Contact in them.	D: Soft.
B: Mostly boys play them.	C: Hardly any Contact.
A: Its contact and you fall over.	A: Less dangerous.
B: Violent	D: Like gymnastics is more flexible and elegant.
D: Because their aggressive.	E: Girls sports are not as messy.

From these answers it is possible to recognize the significant correlation between these responses and the traditional characteristics of femininity and masculinity. These answers were given without any link to gender which emphasises the impact socially constructed stereotypes has on activity choices and sport. In sport the consequence of such assumptions is suggested to be a key reason for girl's disengagement in PE.

Participants were asked to name gender characteristics and the responses were well in accordance with gender stereotyping. Findings indicated that both boys and girls, not surprisingly, considered boys tougher, more aggressive, and able to handle more pain than girls. Girls were regarded as more graceful, coordinated, flexible, and caring. Kopelow (1992) study also identified that girls are generally expected to be gentle, non-aggressive and dependant, while boys are expected to be boisterous, aggressive and independent.

The cognitive component of an attitude is mostly affected by gender stereotypes, the individuals beliefs about sport and their gender identity through sport seems to be questioned when participating in certain activities. For example if a girl was to participate in activity deemed male orientated would it make her less feminine? It appears the social pressure for conforming to gender stereotypes has the biggest impact on girls' participation and behaviour. The pre-existing beliefs about sports are often associated with masculinity and therefore challenge their identity and vice-versa for boys. Participants in this study were asked to discuss the 'need to be masculine or feminine'. Surprisingly neither yr8 boys nor girls felt pressure to be masculine or feminine. However, when discussing femininity and masculinity in more detail the boys did agree that they did have to look a certain way.

[YR8 G] C: Just because you're a girls doesn't mean you have to do girly things. Like most girls painting nails.

[YR8 G] B: Why should we.

In comparison to yr8, yr10 boys held a strong view on the importance of being masculine, for them staying within this 'masculine zone' is compulsory. Yr10 girls also initially said they did not feel pressure to be feminine, however, after clarifying and discussing the characteristics of both gender stereotypes their opinions soon changed, they were all in agreement that they did feel some social pressure to look and act a certain way. These findings identify the distinct differences in the way age affects the way they respond to the social pressure.

Greenwood and Stillwell's (2001) study found one way in which girls try to uphold or display their femininity is the choice of activities they engage in. Their study also found that girl in KS4 avoided activities they believed to be masculine or for 'boys'.

Although, on a general basis, the gender gap in sport participation seems to be decreasing, there is evidence that boys and girls still participate in different sport activities (Eccles and Harold, 1991; Fasting, 2003; Pfister, 1993). An explanation for this continuing trend is that PE programs implement the gender orientated activities in school, and as a result the majority of girls have never experienced playing rugby or football and similarly boys have never experienced hockey or netball.

Participants in this study were asked if they would like to participate in the same activities as boys/girls did in their school. Girls who were *undertaking a GCSE or BTEC PE course* responded very positively and enthusiastically about trying and participating in 'boy's' activities within school. This response was no surprise as Luke and Sinclair (1991) previously identified that students with high perceived competence were more willing to try new activities and engage in more challenging sports.

[YR8 G] E: I'd give it a go because you're playing against your own strength and not boys.

[YR10 G] C: I would because I enjoy football and rugby.

[YR10 G] D: Ye but I'd like to try what they do

[YR10 G] C: but I'd prefer to do the ones we do now than what boys do. Like I'd prefer it but it would be nice to see what they do and them see what we do.

On the other hand the other students did not like the idea of participating or even trying 'boy's' activities. However, surprisingly during discussion and after clarifying it would be within lesson and only girls would be present both yr8 and ten girls who initially said no changed their minds. With this being said however, some girls still seemed unsure and uneasy about the idea.

[YR8 G] B: I'd say no because ill end up braking my neck.

[YR8 G] A: It's boring as well, and they would hurt me.

[YR10 G] C: I wouldn't want to do it.

[YR8 G] E: I'd give it a go because you're playing against your own strength and not boys.

Biddle (1999) found when girls feel that an activity is for boys, they may not have the confidence in their ability to be successful which will ultimately impact their potential for developing skills in a wide range of activities.

In contrast to the girls, the boys did not like the idea of participating in 'girl's' activities, all boys in both key stages instantly said no to the idea. After a small discussion the boys were asked if they would participate in dance, hockey or netball, once again all responded very quickly with a no. The non hesitant response gave the impression that the boys were not able to say yes in front of their male peers.

During the discussions of both focus groups it became evident that the boys saw participating in hockey, dance and netball as a joke or a 'laugh'. When the boys discussed participating in the activities they were almost unable to imagine themselves participating in these sports in a competitive and serious environment.

[YR10 B] C: Well yes I would if like, if all the boys were doing it in PE, I'd take part I would be a laugh.

[YR8 B] C: Because most of the things girls do boys find boring.

[YR10 B] E: I don't like dancing.

The reason for these views could be down to stereotypes and their need to hold a masculine image, and therefore participating in what they perceive as 'girls' sports may result in their masculinity being questioned.

The distinct differences in boys and girls attitudes are evident in this study's findings, however the key finding within the study is the role sport and PE plays in both genders life. From previous research we know that sport is thought to be a male domain, but we also know that the number of girls participating in sport has been increasing. Research from sport science has shown that boys believe that doing well in sports is much more important than girls (Eccles and Harold, 1991; Eccles *et al.*, 1993; Fredricks and Eccles, 2002; Jacobs *et al.*, 2002; Consistently this study also found all boys regard being good at sport and PE as very important. Participants were asked on a scale "on 1-10 how important is it for you to be good at sport?" Overall boys placed importance highly on the scale, with the majority of boys saying

seven or above. On the other hand those *who frequently fail to engage in PE* in yr10 held slightly less importance towards being good at sports. In order to retrieve more information participants were also asked “do you think if you were not good at sport would you feel the need to be good?” Again all boys said yes, they suggested all boys should be able to do some sort of sport.

Whilst sport plays a much greater role in the lifestyle of teenage boys there is a worry that girls participation in sport is given no social importance. The majority of girls rated the importance of being good at PE relatively lower than boys and felt that being good at PE was not very important. However girls who were *undertaking a GCSE or BTEC PE course* had similar views and opinion to the boys. Girls in both yr8 and ten suggested that being good at sport would only be important if they wanted a career in sport as opposed to being important socially or for their sense of self/identity.

[YR10 G] E: I say 6 because if you want to be in the Olympics or a job something to do with sport its quite important but I think it depends on what you want to do in the future

[YR8 G] C: Like if you want to be an athlete when your older then i guess you would need to, but for someone who just want to run a shop they don't really need to know how to play sports

These responses identify the different significance both genders hold toward being good at sport, these differences are a result of socialisation and cultural expectations for each sex. For boys, participation in sport, exercise, and PA is consistent with society's definition of masculinity and is reinforced, emphasized, and encouraged by the attitudes of parents, teachers, coaches, and peers. Greendorfers (1993) study found these perceptions are formed in primary school when boys are encouraged by parents, teachers, and peers to be active in sports, while girls are praised for being quiet and ladylike. The effect stereotypes have within PE and sport is extensive, changing these views and beliefs is difficult however helping and changing how adolescents meet the challenges of gender is likely to affect how they negotiate/ feel about PE.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to compare the attitudes shown towards PE by boys and girls in KS3 and KS4 within a case study school. Through this study, the main objectives were to identify key factors that influence participation within PE and identify whether age and gender had any significant impact on positive or negative attitudes.

Findings propose that student involvement in PE may be influenced by three factors; *Perceived competence and ability; Curriculum activities and Gender assumptions*. These factors had an influence over all the students regardless of their involvement and enjoyment for PE, but certain factors were more prevalent for girls.

In general, students had moderately positive attitudes towards PE with boys and girls in yr8 displaying more positive attitudes than those in yr10. Within this study perceived competence was identified as the strongest predictor of PE class enjoyment and positive attitudes. All students with low perceived competence frequently failed to engage in PE, and perceived competence was found to affect girls' participation significantly more than boys. Findings from this study would suggest there is a need to adapt and change the focus of PE. Currently students feel they have to be of a certain ability level in order to fully engage in PE, changing this view is vital in creating a more meaningful environment for those who do not excel in PE. Adapting PE to be a more meaningful subject can be achieved by changing the focus of PE from competitive to fun, health and fitness orientation. This will allow those with low perceived competence to increase their personal meaning towards PE. The study found that PE was often seen as pointless unless they wanted a career in sport, therefore changing the meaning and focus of PE can be very beneficial for all especially those with low perceived competence.

Students make judgments on the meanings they hold towards something, which then evolve into beliefs (cognitive component) that are difficult to change; this is evidently what has happened to girls in KS4. When students feel comfortable and believe they are competent as a direct result of the creation of a positive learning environment, optimal student learning will occur. Creating a positive learning environment is essential as findings from this study revealed that activities in the PE curriculum are a contributing factor to the decline in adolescence participation. The study discovered the repetitive nature of activities in secondary school has

substantial impact on the students attitudes. The findings suggest by the time students reach yr10 the repetitive nature of activities causes lack of interest. PE educators need to find practical ways to help students in KS4 to stay more engaged in physical activity by stimulating and empowering them.

Findings from this study are consistent with Evans *et al*, (1996) who identified that the highly gendered structure of PE limits the learning opportunities of both boys and girls. In this study gender assumptions and roles were evident in both key stages with boys and girls displaying traditional opinions on feminine and masculinity. A key finding was the importance girls and boys held towards being good at PE, girls held no real significance toward being good at PE. This could be due to the lack of social importance held towards girls participation in sport. Within school certain activities have traditionally been assigned to boys and others to a girl, which theoretically reinforces gender stereotypes within schools. Schools have the power to adapt and change the school curriculum in order to change the students perceptions on gender stereotypes.

For the majority of students, school PE is the only place they engage in any form of PA, the key issue is the decline between yr8 and yr10 where motivation levels need to be maintained throughout this period in their lives in order to maintain their PA levels. During this period students must learn why physical activity is important to helping them become healthy and productive adults. From the study's findings, there is optimism that students attitudes and beliefs about PE can be altered over time with adjustment and efforts by the PE teachers. It would serve teachers and teacher educators well to understand the role the cognitive and affective components of attitude play in understanding overall student attitudes and intentions (Biddle and Mutrie, 2001). It is through this active and meaningful engagement that we can prepare adolescents for participation in physical activity for a lifetime.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

19 Plas-Y-Fedwen
Coed-Y-Cwm
Pontypridd
CF37 3EX

6th of December 2012

Hawthorn High School
School Lane
Hawthorn
Pontypridd
CF37 5AL

Dear: Mr J. Hicks

I am a third year undergraduate student at Cardiff Metropolitan University (UWIC). I am studying BSc (Hons) Sports Coaching. I am currently involved with your school as I have been volunteering once a week in the PE department since September 2012 and I am looking for the help of your pupils and staff for my final year dissertation.

I am conducting a study investigating and comparing the attitudes of KS3 and KS4 pupils towards physical education. Specifically, the research aims to investigate;

- A) What are the attitudes of secondary school students toward physical education?
- B) Do female and male students have similar attitudes toward physical education?
- C) Do students in KS3 and KS4 show different attitudes toward physical education?

Participation in this study involves participating in a focus group with four to five other pupils from the same year group. During the focus groups the pupils will be asked to discuss their thoughts and experiences of PE with the help of questions given by me. (Please find attached a copy of the interview guide that will be used during the focus groups). I hope to administer the focus group during the dinner break or after school if possible. Individuals will be chosen by the head of the PE department, however participation is entirely voluntary and the pupils are free to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the school and pupils will be upheld as far as humanly possible. Pupils names and the school will not appear anywhere in the research. During the research process, the data will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

The current decline in physical activity raises many concerns, this study may help teachers to gain a better understanding of young children's views and attitudes towards physical education and consequently understand why children decide not to participate in PE as they reach adolescence. The aim is to improve PE by helping teachers understand the attitudes held by pupils and how they as teachers can influence and change them to increase physical activity levels.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Alyshia Hier
(Third year undergraduate student)
alyshiahier@hotmail.com

Hywel Iorwerth
(Research Supervisor)
hiorwerth@cardiffmet.ac.uk

APPENDIX B

CARDIFF METROPOLITAN

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

CSS Reference No:

Title of Project: A COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES SHOWN BY BOYS AND GIRLS
IN KEY STAGE 3 AND 4 TOWARDS PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Name of Researcher: Alyshia Hier

Parent/Guardian of child to complete this section:

Please tick each box:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for this evaluation study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that it is possible for him/her to stop taking part at any time, without giving a reason.

3. I also understand that if this happens, my child's relationships with the Cardiff Metropolitan University, or our legal rights will not be affected.

4. I understand that information from the study may be used for reporting purposes, but my child will not be identified.

5. I agree for my child to take part in this study.

Name of Child

Name of Parent/Guardian

Signature of Parent/ Guardian

Date

AlyshiaHier

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature of person taking consent:

APPENDIX C

CHILD'S ASSENT FORM

CSS Reference No:

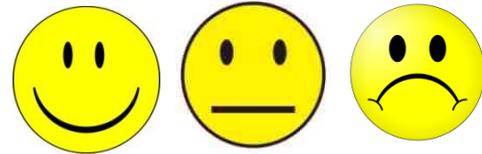
Title of Project: A COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES SHOWN BY BOYS AND GIRLS IN KEY STAGE 3 AND 4 TOWARDS PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Name of Researcher: Alyshia Hier

This form is to insure you understand the purpose of the study and that you wish to take part.

Please tick the box under the face if you:

agree tick the	
are not sure tick	
disagree tick	



I understand the purpose of the research and my role within it.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

I have had a chance to ask questions and have them answered.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

My participation in this study is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop participating at any time and that it will be ok.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

I understand how my answers in the focus group will be used.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

I understand that my parents/guardian have/has given me permission to participate in this study.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

I am happy to take part in the focus group.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

You're Name _____

You're Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D

Cardiff Metropolitan University
Cyncoed Campus
Cyncoed Road
Cardiff
CF23 6XD

Email: alyshiahier@hotmail.com
Telephone: 07854291222

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I am a student at Cardiff Metropolitan University, and currently undertaking a research project that focuses on boys and girls attitudes towards physical education in year eight and ten. I am looking to study the attitudes they possess in order to identify if age and genders have any impact on positive or negative attitudes.

Your child has been randomly selected to participate in this focus group with 3-6 other student on _____ at _____

Your child's involvement is voluntary, however they can only participate if both the assent and consent forms are returned to me or the physical education department either on or before the day of the focus group.

Enclosed you will find attached, a consent form (for you as a parent/guardian to fill in and sign) and information sheets, explaining the relevant information and contact details.

I hope you will allow your child to participate in this study, your child has the right to withdraw at any time during the process and can say yes now and change their mind later. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Faithfully
Alyshia Hier

APPENDIX E

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: A comparison of attitudes show by boys and girls in key stage 3 and 4 towards physical education.

Researcher: Alyshia Hier: School of Sport Cardiff Metropolitan University.

This document is to assist you in making an informed decision about whether you wish your child to take part in this study.

Background

Research has shown that physical activity levels have decreased over the years and has caused a corresponding decline in participation in school physical education. During key stage 3 (years 7,8 and 9) participation is high. However, as children get older research has shown that participation levels decrease significantly especially during age 13-16. There has been many studies conducted on the causes of this decrease, yet not many have studied how children's attitudes toward physical education impact participation. This research aims to compare and study the attitudes boys and girls have towards physical education in key stage 3 and key stage 4.

What does this study involve?

It involves taking part in a focus group “**A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to get your perceptions on a specific subject in a non-formal and non-threatening environment.**” In your child's focus group there will be 3-6 pupils from the same year group. During the focus group your child/children will be asked a variety of question on physical education to which they can answer and discuss their thoughts and feelings. The discussions will be recorded and should last approximately 30 minutes. Before the focus group begins your child must have a signed parent consent form and a completed child's assent form. Questions asked are not compulsory and your child does not have to answer every question if they wish not to.

How data will be collected and used.

The data will be collected solely from the focus group your child is involved with. During the focus group all participants will be asked a variety of questions which will be recorded. I will transcribe the focus group discussion and it will only be read and used by me and not used for any other purpose. The information from these discussions will be the basis of my report

Are there any risks or benefits to your child?

There are no risks involved with this study. Although there will be no direct benefit to your child, the results from the focus groups may help gain a better understanding of young children's views and attitudes towards physical education and understand why children decide not participate in PE as they reach adolescence. My aim is to use the results of the study to help improve PE by helping teachers understand the attitudes held by pupils and how they as teachers can influence and change them to increase physical activity levels in the future.

Confidentiality and the right to withdraw.

At no point during this study will your child be put at any risk. His or her rights as a voluntary participant allows them to enter or withdraw from this study at any point they wish to do so. Everything discussed and said within the focus group will be confidential and your child's identity will not appear in notes, results and any other documents regarding the research findings.

Further Information

If you have any questions about the research, how I intend to conduct study and what will happen with the findings then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Alyshia Hier

e-mail: alyshiahier@hotmail.com

Tel: 07854291222

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

08/04/2012

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: A comparison of attitudes shown by boys and girls in key stage 3 and 4 towards physical education

Researcher: Alyshia Hier: School of Sport Cardiff Metropolitan University.

This document is to assist you in making an informed decision about whether you wish to take part in this study.

Background

Research has shown that physical activity levels have decreased over the years, and has caused a corresponding decline in participation in school physical education. During key stage 3 (years 7, 8 and 9) participation is high. However, as pupils get older research has shown that participation levels decrease significantly especially during the age of 13-16. There has been many studies conducted on the causes of this decrease, yet not many have studied how children's attitudes toward physical education impact their participation. This research aims to understand and compare the attitudes that boys and girls have towards physical education in key stage 3 and key stage 4.

What does this study involve?

It involves taking part in a focus group **“A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to get your perceptions on a specific subject in a non-formal and non-threatening environment.”** In your focus group there will be 3-6 pupils from the same year as you. During the focus group you will all be asked a variety of question on physical education to which you can all answer and discuss your thoughts and feelings. The discussions will be recorded and should last approximately 30 minutes. Before the focus group begins you must have a signed parent consent form and a completed child's assent form.

How data will be collected and used.

The data will be collected solely from the focus group you are involved in. During the focus group you will all be asked a variety of questions which will be recorded. I will transcribe the focus group discussion and it will only be read and used by me and not be used for any other purpose. The information from these discussions will be the basis of my report

Are there any risks or benefits to you?

There are no risks involved with this study. Although there will be no direct benefit to you, the *results* from your focus group may help gain a better understanding of your views and beliefs towards physical education and help answer and understand why pupils decided to not participate in PE as they reach adolescence. I hope that the results of the study will help improve PE and improve PE by helping teachers understand the attitudes held by pupils and how they as teachers can influence and change them to increase physical activity levels in the future.

Confidentiality and the right to withdraw.

At no point during this study will you be put at any risk. Your rights as a voluntary participant allows you to enter or withdraw from this study at any point you wish to do so, you can say yes now and change your mind later, it is up to you. Everything you say and discuss will be confidential and your identity will not appear in notes, results and any other documents regarding the research findings.

Further Information

If you have any questions about the research, how I intend to conduct study and what will happen with the findings then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Alyshia Hier

e-mail: alyshiahier@hotmail.com

Tel: 07854291222

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

08/04/2012



APPENDIX G

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Initial checks

- Ensure that all understand what it is they are doing, and that they are happy to continue and fill in an assent form.
- Ensure all are aware that they can leave the focus group at any time.

Introduction Questions

- Subjects taken for GCSE (Yr 10)
- Favourite subject (Yr 8) + changed?
- Hobbies
- Do you do any sport outside of school?

QUESTIONS ABOUT PE

A B C

Affective	Cognitive	Behaviour
Feeling& Emotions	Beliefs and Knowledge	what they do/Actions

Participation

- A]** Do you **like** PE?
Have you ever liked/dislike PE?
What do you think brought about these changes?
- B]** How frequently do you **engage** in PE?
- C]** Explain to be the benefits of PE?

Family

- A]** Tell me about your parents, do they like sport and do they motivate and encourage you do PE?
- B]** Explain to me how you think your parents feel about you participation in PE?

Friends

- A] Do you feel your friends are a Benefit/hindrance in PE lessons?
- B] How do your friends effect your engagement? (*Probe*= positive/negative)
- C] Does your friends hold the same views about PE as you?
What difference does it make if your friend doesn't like sport?

Teacher

- A] What do you like/dislike about your PE teacher?
- B] Explain how the PE teachers impact your participation and engagement?
- C] Favouritism?

Ability

- A] On a scale of 1-10 with one being poor and 10 being excellent where would you put yourself in terms of ability?
- B] How would you feel about PE if you were at a different ability level? (more/less) and explain why?
- C] Could you give me any reasons why someone should not participate in a sport outside of school?
How do you think someone's ability will affect their decision?

Activities

- A] what kind of activities do you do in school PE?
- B] If you don't like an activity do you still participate? (yes or no)
- C] Think back on an activity you do not like (give them a minute in silence to think) reflect on an experience that you think might be responsible for this view.

GENDER INFLUENCES

Q. Name activities you associate with boys

Q. Explain to me why you came up with those sports?

Where have you learnt this?

- *Repeat for girls*

+ Do you think any sports suit boys better than girls? And why is that?)

Q. Suppose you could participate in the same activities as boys/girls in school would you? If no, why?

Q. What do you like/ dislike about doing different activities to boys/girls?

Q. Explain to me who you think is better at sport girls or boys?

Q. Do you feel you have a certain image to hold as boys or girls?

Q. Describe to me the characteristics/traits of fem and masc ?

Q. On a scale of 1-10 how important is it for you to b good at sport?

Q. Do you feel you need to be masculine/feminine?

Extra questions

- What do you like about PE?
- Who influences your decision the most? Friends family teacher
- Do you believe PE is useful?

If you could change one thing about PE what would it be?

Thank you for your time ☺