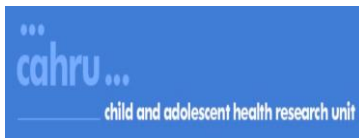


Exploring experiences and engagement of adolescent girls in Physical Education classes, during a physical activity intervention.

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fit for
girls

Background to PhD

- My qualitative PhD data has been collected from four case study schools involved in the Fit for Girls project.
- ‘Fit for Girls’ is a 3 year intervention (by **sportscotland** and the Youth Sport Trust) which aims to get girls aged 11-16 more physically active in Scotland.
- Delivered to the physical activity workforce in Scotland’s secondary schools to increase girls’ participation in PA.



Methodology

- Disengaged girls identified from case study schools by questionnaire (S2).
- 12 Baseline focus groups (n=41) with peer groups gave insights into barriers and issues in PE environment before Fit for Girls was implemented (start S3).
- Twenty girls selected for longitudinal individual in-depth interviews, carried out over a one year period (three cohorts).

The *nature* of the in-depth longitudinal will allow trust to be built resulting in a significant amount and quality of data (O’Kane, 2001).



Aims:

- 1) To explore disengaged girls experiences in the PE environment.
- 2) To track the *processes of change* in girls attitudes and engagement in four PE environments, from S2 to S4.

“Research has focused on identifying adolescents as either active or inactive, less is known about the perspectives and experiences of the adolescent who has successfully moved from inactivity to activity”
(Brooks and Magnusson, 2006; page 873).



Theoretical Framework

Based on Welks (1999) Youth Physical Activity Promotion model (YPAP), a socio-ecological approach which divides the influential correlates of physical activity into:

- Individual-level *predisposing factors comprising the cognitive and affective considerations (is it worth it? and am I able?)*
- *Enabling factors*, including personal attributes e.g., skills and fitness) and environmental or access variables
- *Reinforcing factors* reflecting social influences



Barriers to girls engagement:

- Many girls felt they did not have the skills to perform in PE classes
- PE was often seen as not 'worth the hassle' due to the unsupportive nature of the PE environment.
- Girls find it difficult to remain sporty and feminine and so many opt for the later.
- Friends are an important influence on girls' engagement in PE classes, but the relationships girls have with each other can be complex.
- Boys can dominate the PE class and the presence of boys can cause identity conflicts for girls that want to appear feminine, yet still want to engage.
- The teacher relationship is important for girls' engagement. If girls don't feel valued, acknowledged or encouraged this can lead to further disengagement.

Longitudinal interview data (during FfG project) indicates:

- The environment in which PE is delivered is central to understanding girls' experiences and engagement. There were subtle, as well as clear changes in engagement in most of the girls.
- Offering a choice of activity is important, but girl's choices are often influenced by other factors such as peers and teachers.
- Consultation and giving girls a voice is central to changing attitudes and behaviour
- A supportive PE environment, including good relationships with PE teachers, is critical for engaging adolescent girls in PE classes.