INTRODUCTION

As a teacher of secondary Physical Education (PE) I have become increasingly aware of the largely negative attitudes held towards physical activity in general and PE in particular by many teenage girls. This negativity takes many forms and has been well documented by the likes of Leaman (1986); Scraton (1992); Shropshire et al. (1997). Research evidence and my own practical teaching experience confirm that the forms this negativity takes range from a waning enthusiasm for extra curricular sporting activities, to non-participation in, or even absence from PE lessons. The consequences are various, but it is widely agreed that these girls and young women are not only missing out on a vital part of their education and experience, but that they also lose out in terms of the beneficial aspects of participation in sport such as health, self-esteem and enjoyment (BBC Radio 4 1998; Health Education Authority 1998; Nike UK 1998). Importantly this loss takes effect not just at school, but continues to deprive women in terms of physically active post-school life-styles and life-long learning (Deem and Gilroy 1998; Wright and Dewar 1997).

In recent decades many researchers in the field of gender have begun to emphasise the need to ‘give voice’ to those less frequently heard in the research. It is surprising then, that “… there is little data which gives the pupils a voice” (Williams and Woodhouse 1996:201). I support the view of Barritt et al. (cited in Sparkes 1992:83) who encourage researchers in education to “… start by talking to children about their experiences”. For these reasons this study aims to explore the experiences and understandings of female secondary students in order to offer a further contribution to the ‘grounding’ of “… a more inclusive conceptualisation of physical education” (Sparkes 1992:75).

The aim in this research is to establish to what extent negativity exists and the reasons for it. My ‘hunch’ is that even if girls do not ‘drop-out’, their feelings towards PE - both positive and negative - may change. In order to better understand both ‘drop out’ and more nuanced changes in attitude girls’ opinions must surely be worth listening to. At this stage in the research it was deemed appropriate to use a questionnaire to collect information as it would
allow various benefits considering the limited time and resources available. The standardised questions and largely quantifiable results provided by this method also allow data to be analysed in a relatively straightforward manner (Cohen and Manion 1994; Munn and Drever 1990).

This paper is organised into the following sections. Firstly, I describe the methods used. Secondly, I discuss the results and identify challenges for the Physical Education profession with regards to gender. Thirdly, I consider reflexively my ‘journey’ through the methodologies and methods involved in this research. Finally, I conclude by suggesting links between the paradigms debate in research, and the need for a more ‘qualitative’ approach to the teaching of PE.
METHOD

Questionnaire Design

Questions were designed to cover the following (see Appendix I for questionnaire):

♦ Enjoyment of and feelings towards PE lessons.
♦ Effort made in PE lessons and factors that encourage or put students off PE.
♦ Participation in lessons and extra curricular activities.
♦ Activities liked and disliked within PE lessons.
♦ Any long term illness or disability that affects the students in their PE lessons.
♦ Students’ perceived ability in PE.
♦ The likelihood of their choosing GCSE PE as a year 10 option.

Various opportunities were also given for the students to “add anything you would like to” in an open question format following Kerlinger’s advice (cited in Cohen and Manion 1994:276-8). The idea being to

… supply a frame of reference for respondents’ answers, but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression.

Such open-ended items have the advantage of the flexibility necessary for obtaining spontaneous, unanticipated and more expressive answers (Oppenheim 1966).

See Appendices II and III, for the verbal instructions and ‘de-brief’ given to students before and after questionnaire completion. And Appendices IV and V for the set of questions designed to gather information from teachers concerning background information on the school, the department and the particular group of students involved; and a summary of the relevant results. The questionnaire was piloted on six girls known to me who were able to contribute constructively to discussions on content, format and clarity.

Sampling

Year 9 students (aged 13 and 14 years) were chosen for this study because relevant research, and experience as a teacher, show that this is a crucial time for girls in PE. Further, it is in the
middle of the age range where many girls’ interest in PE declines (Butcher 1985; Carrington and Williams 1988; Dickenson and Sparkes 1988).

Six state run schools were chosen in provincial towns in Hampshire and Cambridgeshire. They were considered to a certain extent to share indices with, and thereby be representative of, many British secondary schools. Each varied slightly in terms of the socio-economic composition of its student population, although all have an intake of predominantly white students with small numbers of students from Asian backgrounds –largely second generation Muslim immigrants from Pakistan in particular- but very few from Afro-Caribbean or other ethnic minority families.

The aim was not to compare schools as differing institutions, rather to provide a “stratified” sample of respondents from a range of schools and PE departments and a range of personal backgrounds and experiences. (See Appendix V for details of the varying aspects of each PE department involved in the survey). The sample of students surveyed was of mixed academic and physical ability, with a broad range of attitudes towards PE. Whilst the extent to which these girls’ views are generalisable to other Year 9 girls or to which they remain stable over time is questionable, they were deemed nonetheless to provide a ‘stratified’ sample and be ‘representative’ of their year group within each school.

**Administration and Analysis of the Questionnaire**

A formal letter was sent to the Principal/Head Teacher of each school asking for permission to administer the questionnaire (see Appendix VI), to which positive replies were received from five of the six schools. Of the 108 completed questionnaires nine were discarded on technical grounds of incompleteness and inaccuracy. It was decided for reasons of time to limit the sample to 75 questionnaires for analysis (Hemsley-Brown 1998, informal communication) therefore a further 24 were randomly discarded.

Codes were developed for the categorisation of responses to *open* questions and responses to *closed* questions were clustered and categorised. Results were interpreted primarily in a purely mathematical way avoiding any inferences and attempting to keep the data as “interpretation free” as possible (see Cohen and Manion 1994; Munn and Drever 1990).
However, not only did difficulties and complications arise – such as ambiguous answers, but I also began to relate my own ideas and suggestions, or ‘hunches’, to the data to see if they were supported by the collected evidence. Finally, I found myself being critical of my own method and wanting to explore the relative merits of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research. For a discussion of these latter points see the final section of this paper, *Considering method*. 
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section considers the educational importance of motivation in and enjoyment of PE lessons together with the relevant responses from the survey. This is followed by discussions of the factors affecting these Year 9 girls’ motivation in PE lessons and their enjoyment of them, (see Appendix VII for tabulated results).

The Importance of Enjoyment and Motivation in PE Lessons

For the purposes of this discussion it is firstly important to ascertain why students’ enjoyment of lessons is an important factor for teachers of PE. It might be argued that the provision of ‘fun’ or entertainment for students should not necessarily be a priority. However, even the most attainment-driven teachers and parents should consider the substantial evidence that demonstrates clear links between a student’s enjoyment of a curricular subject, their motivation to achieve in lessons, and their attainment in them (Brophy 1998; Winch 1998). Further, it should be remembered that gender plays a significant role in that boys have higher perceptions of athletic self-competence (Trew et al. 1999). In addition, enjoyment, or lack of it, in school PE lessons often forms the basis of choices in adult life involving engagement in physical activity (see Fig. 1 below; see also Davidson 1982; Deem 1987; Hendry 1986; Scraton 1987; and Wright and Dewar 1997. Fox (1994:19) explains that

… reliance on intrinsic rewards [e.g. enjoyment] from activity remains throughout life as being the best predictor of sustained involvement.

![Fig. 1](image-url) Relationships between enjoyment, effort and attainment.
Are Girls Motivated to “Try Hard” in PE Lessons?

Having established the importance of motivation and effort to a student’s attainment in PE and life-long learning the results of the survey were encouraging in that 64% (48) students said they always, or usually tried hard in PE lessons last term and only 9% (7) answered negatively. However, over a quarter (27%) said they only sometimes tried hard, sometimes not, (see Appendix VII, Table 3). It could be argued that regularly bringing PE kit to, and regular participation in, PE lessons also indicate effort and motivation on behalf of the student. The vast majority of girls who answered the questionnaire stated that they had brought their PE kit (87%) and taken part in (80%) most or all of their PE lessons last term (see Appendix VII, Tables 4 & 5). However, it is important to highlight that one student in five (15) had missed about half, or more, of last term’s PE lessons. This alarming level of non-participation was also revealed in Milosevic’s (1986) study of 4 Leeds schools. She found that whilst girls and boys aged 11 and 12 were just as likely to be excused from PE, girls of 15 and 16 years were twice as likely to miss PE as the boys.

Motivation levels in ten of the girls answering the questionnaire were particularly worrying as they gave reasons of avoiding the lesson for not taking part (see Appendix VII, Table 6). The following comments are indicative of this attitude,

I don’t normally do PE I get a note from my Mum.

…I try and get out of it.

Similarly 35% of the reasons given for not bringing kit (16 students) were in order to avoid taking part in the lesson (see Appendix VII, Table 7).4

…sometimes it was an excuse to get out of it.

I don’t always want to do PE so I don’t bother to bring it.

I bring my PE kit to the lesson I like.

The indications here are that there are a substantial number of girls who remain on the borderlines of enjoying/not enjoying PE (53%) and of trying hard/not trying in PE lessons (27%). It becomes clear that as well as concern over those girls who hardly ever or never enjoy PE (16%), who do not try hard in lessons (9%), or indeed who sometimes neglect to bring kit in order to avoid doing PE (21%), research in PE must seek to explore the reasons
why girls sometimes enjoy and are sometimes motivated in PE. Smith (1992:61) rightly warns researchers against “… overlooking the lifeworld of physical education in all its experiential complexity”. In order to overcome this adult/teacher-centred perspective Sparkes (1992:85) argues for

…an attentiveness to the things that matter to children, to that which brings us in touch with the experiences of children, and ultimately, to the good [or bad] contained within such experience.

Based on these reasons, I consider below some of the factors that motivate girls to try hard in PE or which may disincline them to make that effort. This is followed by a discussion of girls’ enjoyment and dislike of PE.

Factors Affecting Girls’ Motivation in PE

Respondents to the questionnaire made 46 mentions of reasons why they tried hard in their PE lessons last term (see Appendix VII, Table 8). Of these mentions I categorised 21 (46%) under “keenness to achieve”. This was by far the most popular reason given for “trying hard” and included statements such as

I usually tried hard because I want to do well and get good assessments.

I usually tried hard because I wanted to get a good report, get better in the activity.

In the same vein 6 (12%) of the 49 mentions of de/motivating factors concerned mood or laziness which can arguably be considered factors on, (albeit near the other end of), the same continuum as “keenness to achieve”. Examples include,

I’m just not in the mood.

I didn’t always try hard because I couldn’t be bothered.

In total 28% of mentions of de/motivating factors pertained to this ‘drive’ continuum of keenness (or not) to “do well”. Such findings support the arguments of Woodhouse (1997:41) who points out the need to

… encourage an atmosphere where those pupils engage in purposeful activities because they feel a need and want to learn. (His emphasis).
Clearly these students have “appetites” for learning which should be not only valued and nurtured by the PE profession but learned from in order to encourage and develop them in other, less motivated students.

Research shows that a major factor influencing this ‘drive’ that any individual student may bring to a learning experience, is self-concept (Brophy 1998; Trew et al. 1997). A student’s self image and consequent self-esteem, “are going to affect both their approach to learning and their subsequent levels of performance” (Woodhouse (1997:42). Research also demonstrates significant gender differences in that boys tend to have more positive views of their global self-worth and their athletic competence than girls (Kremer et al. 1997; Van Wersch 1997). This self-perceived ability and consequent self-concept may, of course, vary according to the activity. In this way girls’ self-concept and therefore their motivation and learning will be influenced by the activities done (Woodhouse 1997). Indeed activity(ies) done in PE lessons were by far the most commonly mentioned reason by girls in the current survey for not trying hard in PE (31% of mentions) and the second most common positive reason for trying hard (28% of mentions; see Appendix VII, Table 8). Later in this section I discuss how self-perceived abilities (and therefore activities) form a crucial area for consideration in the promotion of girls’ enjoyment of as well as motivation in PE (see Figure 2 overleaf).

Some girls (8%) described PE as “boring” (see Appendix VII, Table 8). This was not a typical response but it may still be worthy of consideration as a demotivating factor. However for reasons of space it must suffice to say here that comments made by the girls on the questionnaire suggested that the response “boring” stems from factors such as the activity, the student’s self-perceived ability, lesson style, the low status of PE as a school subject.

Another reason given by the respondents for not trying hard in PE lessons was that they disliked PE (10%). Similarly a number of girls said they tried hard in PE because they enjoyed it (15%) (see Appendix VII, Table 8; and Figure 2). In the next section I consider girls’ enjoyment/dislike of PE. I feel it is important in doing so to consider the opinions and attitudes of all girls, whether they consider themselves to ‘like’ PE or not. This is because they will have diverse opinions concerning a myriad of different aspects of PE and each individual’s response may be valuable in understanding someone else’s attitude. For example, the same girl who responded positively,
I think PE is fun and helps me exercise… added,
…but I do get embarrassed performing in front of others.

Do Girls Enjoy PE?

When the Year 9 girls in the survey were asked how they felt about their PE lessons last term, less than one-third of them (23) replied positively, i.e. that they *always* or *nearly always* enjoyed PE lessons last term. Over half (40) answered that they *sometimes* enjoyed them, *sometimes not*, whilst more than one girl in six answered negatively, that she *hardly ever* or *never* enjoyed PE lessons last term, (see Appendix VII, Table 1). These figures appear to be supported by the fact that only 21% of these girls said that they will/would take GCSE PE as an option in Year 10, and 40% said they definitely would not.

This evidence lends support to other studies such as Williams and Woodhouse’s (1996) survey of nearly three thousand students (girls and boys) in Years 9 and 11 in urban mixed comprehensive schools. They found that 14.5% of the girls in their survey disliked PE (interestingly only 5.2% of the boys did). Similar evidence has been found in surveys by Mason (1995); Shropshire *et al.* (1997); and Stoll and O’Keefe (1989). Further, it is of relevance to highlight that whilst respondents to the questionnaire made a total of 45 mentions of reasons for *enjoying* PE, almost twice as many (84) mentions were made of reasons for *not enjoying* PE, (see Appendix VII, Table 2).

So whilst many girls appear to enjoy PE lessons, the *majority* of girls in this survey *sometimes did not*, and a substantial number (more than 1 in 6) did *not ever*, or *hardly ever*, enjoy PE last term. Furthermore, research that lends support to these findings demonstrates that this negativity is far more prevalent in girls than in boys and increasingly so as they get older, (Mason 1995; Milosevic1986; Scraton 1992; Williams and Woodhouse 1996).

Factors Affecting Girls’ Enjoyment/Dislike of PE Lessons
The reasons emerging from this survey that explain negative attitudes are complex; but for the purposes of this paper I group the influences into three main themes identifiable as girls’ perceptions of the following,

- their own athletic ability;
- the social acceptability of sporting females; and
- the physical aspects of PE.

Students’ Perceived Ability

As previously discussed, perceived self-competence is a major influential factor on a participant’s enjoyment of a particular activity (Gilroy 1989; Theberge 1991). The students’ own ability was the second most named factor (50 mentions) negatively affecting girls attitudes to PE in responses to all open questions on the questionnaire (see Appendix VII, Table 10; and Fig. 2). The importance of ability to these girls is exemplified in comments such as,

I really hated the thought of PE but I enjoy it when I’m good at it.

I especially like netball because I think I’m good at it.

I don’t like football because I don’t know how to play it.

I didn’t try hard very often because I knew I couldn’t do it.

It is also widely recognised that girls are likely to have a lower perception of their ability in PE than boys (Fox 1994; Mason 1995; Shropshire and Carroll 1998). Earl and Stennett’s (1987) study found that girls, more than boys, gave “embarrassment about low skill levels” as a reason for not liking PE. Similarly, Milosevic (1986) notes girls’ lack of confidence in their physical abilities. Fox (1994) identifies the need here to analyse young people’s perceptions and thought processes rather than imposing our own adult (and I would add, teachers’) perceptions and values on the situation. He proposes that as teenagers’ decision-making “machinery” becomes more sophisticated the “costs” of participation in sport or physical activity are often seen to outweigh the “benefits”. Van Wersch (1992:57) support this view by explaining that whereas young children comprehend that “to try hard is to succeed”, young
adolescents begin to realise that effort alone does not represent ability. This has clear connotations for both curricular and extra curricular physical activities and becomes particularly relevant when considering girls’ generally low self-perceived sporting ability compared with boys (Mason 1995).

The consequent low ‘ego’ and ‘task-orientation’ of girls commented on by Fox (1994) has serious consequences not only for girls’ attainment in PE lessons and extra curricular activities but also for their post-school lifestyles and health (Evans 1984; Graydon 1997; Hendry 1986). Thomas (1985) found that one of the main factors contributing to long term disinclination as adults to engage in sport and exercise were bad memories of PE at school including “a self-image of not being athletically competent”. Disturbing then are comments from these students such as

…I’m so hopeless at it.

I miss the ball…

…I’m rubbish at it

I can’t run the track.

As PE covers a remarkably wide range of activities (although some would say not wide enough), it could be expected that students’ perceptions of their own ability would vary within the subject. This notion appears to be supported by the answers of 57 (76%) of the 75 girls answering the questionnaire, who replied that their ability “in PE in general” depends on the activity in particular (see Appendix VII, Table 11). Indeed, “activity/ies done in PE” was the single most important factor that girls in this survey gave as affecting their enjoyment or dislike of PE lessons last term (see Appendix VII, Table 2). These findings complement those of other researchers such as Figley (1985) and Underwood (1988) (cited in Van Wersch et al. 1992:59), who found that “… many reasons for pupils’ enthusiasm and interest in PE are sought in the PE curriculum itself”.

The findings of this survey support the notion that much of the importance placed on activity is based on the student’s self-perceived ability in that activity. “Being good at” a particular activity was the second most popular reason (mentioned 32 times) for enjoying it; “not being good at” it was the second most popular reason (given also 32 times) for not enjoying an activity (see Appendix VII, Tables 12 & 9 respectively). Interestingly this self-perception of
ability and its accompanying confidence, was highest with regard to netball and gymnastics - two ‘female’ activities where traditional societal assumptions tend to approve of and reconfirm girls abilities and consequently their feminine identities. Girls may not necessarily be better at these activities than boys in actual physical terms, but assumed to be superior because they are girls. This lends support to the finding that in general the girls answering the questionnaire had the lowest self-perception of their ability in the activities of football - the epitome of male sporting involvement in this country - and running, in which fitness, speed, endurance and perseverance - all typically assumed to be ‘masculine’ qualities – are revered (see Appendix VII, Table 13).

It is clear that girls feel their abilities are restricted to certain activities. It follows that their confidence and enjoyment will also be restricted to these activities (see Fig. 2), particularly when such stereotyping of gender-appropriate ability is reinforced by the attitudes and behaviours of many teachers (Evans et al. 1996; Pratt 1985; Scraton 1992; Wright 1991). Indeed Williams and Woodhouse (1996:209) express concern that students, including boys with regard to dance and gymnastics, “… may well be learning more about what they cannot do than about positive achievement”.

The challenge for the PE profession in this area is twofold. Firstly, girls need to be taught in a positive mode to discover and believe in their competencies. This could be facilitated through more use of pupil-centred teaching strategies such as Teaching Games for Understanding and the use of self-improvement types of goal-setting as opposed to goals involving inter-student comparisons (Fox 1994; Graydon 1997). However, equally important is the need to provide a less competitive and male-dominated atmosphere in PE lessons in which girls are encouraged and allowed to learn in this more positive way (Deem 1984; Griffin 1989; Stanworth 1983; Wright 1997).

Secondly, girls need to be taught the skills and competencies, and to be encouraged and helped to the levels of fitness, that will allow them (all) to take themselves seriously as reasonably capable sports people (Sports Council 1998). Graydon (1997:77) challenges teachers to help girls break out of this “self-destructive spiral” by showing how

… we can change the sometimes tentative, sometimes negative, feelings of girls and women into positive ones which will foster and enhance their enjoyment of the activities…
However, obstructing the progress of such objectives is the fundamental incompatibility of the dichotomised cultures of emphasised adolescent femininity on the one hand, and sport, the epitome of hegemonic (heterosexual) masculinity on the other.

The Social (Un)Acceptability of Sporting Females

It is widely documented that sport, physical activity and PE present a male image in Western society and are “bound up with masculine values” (Scraton 1987:176). In contrast, girls and women are socialised into the culture of femininity with its obligatory modesty, grace, non-assertiveness, physical incapacity and (heterosexual) desirability. Whilst recognising that girls are not ‘cultural dopes’ and there is often some degree of resistance to these pressures, the task of identity construction during adolescence involves a great need to belong. At secondary school age the pressures to conform are particularly compelling as

… those who do not demonstrate evidence of their femininity are either seen as immature or sexually ‘abnormal’. (Cockerill and Hardy 1987:150)

Consequently many teenage girls and young women tend to grasp at the ‘cult’ of femininity and find themselves succumbing (to a greater or lesser degree) to their sub-cultures’ cogent ground rules (Griffin 1982; McRobbie 1978).

Bodies

A fundamental part of identifying with and belonging to teenage girls’ and young women’s sub-cultures is an obsession with physical appearance, or the “woman-as-object” ideology (Scraton1993:45). Teenage girls and young women are encouraged to endlessly strive for the ‘perfect’ slim, sexually desirable, body. Fox (1994) points out the irony that at exactly the time these girls and young women have to cope with the drastic changes to their bodies during puberty, the physical self becomes a very public and salient aspect of the self-esteem complex. Due to this “social physique anxiety” (Hart et al. cited in Graydon 1997:74) girls tend to have a poorer self image than boys, be more unhappy with their body shape and more often than boys avoid physical activity (Aldridge 1998; Hill and Brackenridge 1989; Mason 1995; Milosevic1986). In response to the questionnaire several girls commented on their lack of confidence, embarrassment and even shame with regard to their bodies. Self-
consciousness was mentioned several times as a reason for not enjoying PE (see Appendix VII, Table 2). The following comments from students illustrate this,

I think in PE you have to feel good and comfortable to do your best! You have to be confident.

If someone is worried about appearance then they won’t want to do PE.

I am really embarrassed about my body …

I hate it because I feel different to other girls in my class… always felt like I was being stared at a lot…I do not like PE because I felt that I am fat and I am very worried that people can see that I am. Sometimes I wear my hippsters and a baggy jumper to hide it.

These quotes illustrate Gilroy’s (1989:170) assertion that “The physical, therefore, is not just physical, it is also social”. It follows that some girls’ reluctance to take part in PE, and the large numbers that stop doing extra-curricular sport (see Appendix VII, Table 14), stem from this conflict in cultures and girls’ instructed lack of confidence in the physical domain. This notion is supported by the finding that “doing sport in front of others” puts off more than half (53%) the girls who answered the questionnaire (see Appendix VII, Table 15).

The challenge for the PE profession is to facilitate, for girls, experience of the control, empowerment and exhilaration that can be gained by involvement in physical exercise (in whatever form it may be). In this way girls may learn to be more assertive and self-accepting of their bodies (and those of others) which in turn is likely to increase their confidence and therefore their enjoyment and their participation levels in physical activity. However, as previously alluded to there are fundamental obstacles to this process in the form of the dominant assumptions that form the basis of teenage girls’ subcultures, that girls and young women do not necessarily need or want such power and control. Clearly many girls need to gain some degree of autonomy from their dominant subcultures to help them recognise the benefits of reconstructing these subcultures to be more positive in terms of the physical, and to recognise the relevance of empowerment to them.

Kit

It is also important to recognise that the challenge to girls’ femininity (and therefore their sense of belonging and security) may not be caused by actual participation in physical activity
alone. Their anxiety is often accentuated by wearing compulsory PE kit, together with getting changed before and after lessons. My experience as a teacher supports these and others’ research findings that many girls are reluctant to wear kit that exposes the body or parts of it and is commonly seen as unflattering and unfashionable (Aldridge 1998; Milosevic 1986; Scraton 1987; Shilling 1993). Based on these reasons the questionnaire asked the Year 9 girls how they felt about wearing their correct PE kit. Over one quarter of them (27%) said it put them off PE (see Appendix VII, Table 15). In addition there were a number of statements (19) in response to the ‘open’ questions which signalled dissatisfaction with PE kits (see Appendix VII, Table 10) such as,

Everything I do [in] PE Im embarrased so I don’t bring my kit in because of my legs…

… my legs look massive in shorts and its embarrassing.

As part of their membership of the cult of femininity many adolescent girls and young women adopt symbols of adult femininity such as jewellery, make-up, hairstyling and so on, all of which take time (and skill) to apply. This may go some way towards explaining why almost one-third of the girls in the study said they were put off PE by having to follow departmental rules about jewellery removal, hair tying etc. Several girls made complaints on the questionnaire, of

♦ not being allowed showers (3 mentions),
♦ having dirty, smelly changing rooms (3) and
♦ not having enough time to get changed (4).

Interestingly, I had not previously considered the particular relevance of these concerns. However, in the light of Cockerill and Hardy’s (1987) reference to the “hassle” and time needed for removal of these ‘symbols’ before PE and reapplication of them afterwards, it becomes clear that both the departmental rules and the time allowed for changing become extremely relevant to those adolescent girls and young women who feel the need to ‘reconstruct’ their femininity after PE lessons. Also pertinent here are the negative statements made about PE by girls who

… hate getting dirty …

And who don’t enjoy it when

… you get all muddy.
Friends and Boys in PE

Several comments made by the girls on the questionnaire drew attention to the fact that for some girls their levels of confidence in PE was lowered by having boys present in the class.

When the boys laugh at me if I make a mistake it can put me off.

…the boys make fun if you can’t kick the ball…if you miss and your with boys who take the mick then they embarrase you…I would prefer to do PE as all girls instead of mixed.

It follows from the preceding discussions that the ambiguities concerning girls’ (heterosexual) femininity that PE often causes – in the form of ‘inappropriate’ physical activity in unfashionable clothing – becomes increasingly intense for some girls when PE is taught in mixed sex groups. Many girls find themselves in the dilemma that in order to ‘succeed’ as far as the teacher is concerned, they need to demonstrate the ‘masculine’ traits of skill, physical perseverance and fitness; while to ‘succeed’ in terms of their male classmates, they need to “preserve their carefully constructed feminine image” (Cockerill and Hardy 1987:149).

Undoubtedly to achieve in one aspect is to fail in the other because of the polarised dichotomy of gender identities; the consequences of this for girls in PE inevitably include inequity and discrimination (Rutherford 1990). It is arguable that single sex groupings would allow some degree of challenge to these dominating hierarchies by providing a less sexist, more positive, environment in which to develop girls’ skills and confidences (Deem 1984; Evans et al. 1987; Graydon 1997; Scraton 1990; Stanworth 1983).

Where attitudes to and perceptions of ability vary so much between the sexes, it does seem unlikely that mixed sex groupings will provide an equitable experience for all pupils. (Williams and Woodhouse 1996:210)

This, argues Milosevic (1986) is especially so in the case of strongly stereotyped activities being taught to the opposite sex.

Almost one-third (24) of the girls answering the questionnaire said they were put off by being in a class with boys, and only 8 said it encouraged them. Similarly, almost a quarter (17) said they were encouraged by being in a class with just girls, while only a small number (5) said this put them off (see Appendix VII, Table 15). Studies comparing girls’ with boys’ attitudes have found that girls disliked mixed PE more than boys (Earl and Stennett cited in Van Wersch et al. 1992; Lirgg cited in Graydon 1997) and that these feelings increased as they got older (Aldridge 1998; Mason 1995; Milosevic 1986). Although the majority of girls in
most cases (including this survey) did not appear to mind being taught PE with boys, if we are attempting to encourage and involve the one in five girls who are negative about PE, we must surely consider the concerns of those who do mind doing PE with boys. There may not be a generally negative response by girls, and it may not concern all activities, as this comment suggests …

I don’t really mind doing dance or that sort of thing with boys. But not running – outside sports it’s inbarising if your rubbish,

… but evidence shows that in mixed sex settings “… boys climb over girls” (Deem 1984) and in PE in particular “Boys muscle in where angels fear to tread” (Scraton 1987). Clearly some girls will be disadvantaged as a result. This is highlighted by comments such as

I didn’t want to do trampolining in front of the boys so I sat down … and wasn’t there on 2 lessons.

… usually they don’t pay any attension the male teacher gives it to the boys.

What is needed is for teachers to “unlearn” their largely stereotyped attitudes (Clarricoates 1980; Delamont 1980; Griffin 1989; Spender 1982; Talbot 1986) and to

♦ Provide single sex scenarios when possible and necessary.
♦ To confront the ‘hassling’ of girls by boys in mixed PE classes (Campbell and Brooker 1990; Griffin 1983; Scraton 1992).
♦ Ensure a proportionate amount of their time and attention is spent on girls.  

In considering grouping arrangements it is relevant to note that while over half the respondents agreed that they make new friends in PE (56%), and almost half said it made no difference to them to work on their own (43%), the vast majority (83%) said they are encouraged in PE when working with friends (see Appendix VII, Table 15). Comments included,

… it’s better if we make our own groups.

Sometimes pe can be really good but if you don’t always have a partner it can spoil it.
Similarly, Roberts and Parsell found that “From early childhood, there are indications that girls show a greater interest than boys in leisure activities involving social contact” (cited in Deem and Gilroy 1998: 100).

Equally relevant to the subject of PE is the well acknowledged importance of ‘small friendship groups’ within teenage girls’ subcultures (Griffin 1985; McRobbie 1978). Girls in this study were twice as likely to be encouraged by their best friends’ attitudes in PE as put off. Mason (1995) also found girls were encouraged by their friends. Naturally this depends on the prevailing attitudes within the sub-cultures of teenage girls towards PE. Scraton (1992) argues that these subcultures are incompatible with, and have a negative effect on participation rates; further, Shropshire and Carroll (1998) found girls more than boys negatively affected by “others’ attitudes”. As Fox (1994: 18) rightly states we need to create … a microsocial climate or norm which is very accepting of the value of physical activity…

so that adolescent girls’ ‘need to belong’ can be fulfilled in a positive way with regards to their involvement in physical activity in general and PE in particular.

**Teachers and Role Models**

It is conceivable that the positive ‘climate’ mentioned above might be more successfully fostered where girls are taught PE by female teachers. Indeed while only 4 of the girls in the survey said they were encouraged by having a male teacher, nearly four times as many were encouraged by having a female teacher. Similarly, only 3% were put off by having a female teacher while nearly six times as many were put off by having a male teacher (see Appendix VII, Table 15). Aldridge (1998) found that some girls preferred female PE teachers as they were more likely to be sympathetic with regards to periods. Lyons (1998) study also showed some female PE teachers acted as positive role models and catalysts for girls’ enthusiasm for PE.

However, it is important to note that teachers’ personalities (both male and female) and their teaching styles do not always have a positive effect on girls’ enthusiasm (Lyons 1998; Mason 1995; see Fig.2). In response to the open questions on my questionnaire, there were 55
mentions of teacher/lesson styles being a negative factor in girls’ PE lessons (see Appendix VII, Table 10). Examples include,

When we’re doing something like basketball I think we should play more games.

Our teachers doesn’t give us much of a chance to prove ourselves so she puts all the good people on one team.

…teacher patronising my skills …not happy.

This was the most common negative response to PE; it was also the second most common reason for not enjoying and not trying hard in PE lessons. Similarly less than a quarter (21%) of the girls surveyed said they are encouraged by their PE teacher, and one in three (33%) are put off by them (see Appendix VII, Tables 2, 8 & 15). Fifteen of the 55 mentions of dissatisfaction with the teacher referred directly to teachers who are “…always on your case”, “…moan at you…” and “push us too far.” This supports evidence found by Lyons’ (1998) in her study of schools in London which found a “substantial number” of Year 8 and 10 female students alluded to “bossy and over bearing” female PE teachers. Dickenson and Sparkes (1988) also found that a common reason for not liking PE amongst the students they sampled, was dislike of the teacher’s approach. Much evidence has been found, to support the suggestion that the able, skilful and achieving student will receive more attention, encouragement and reward (Bell 1986; Davidson 1982; Evans 1984; Hendry 1986; Scraton 1986). Several comments on the questionnaires made similar points,

…I think teachers should pay equal amounts of attention to everyone and encourage the ones that aren’t as good at it.

It depends which teacher I have. I like the teacher I have now…but the others just concentrate on the people that are really good at PE and not any one else.

Thus it may be that the girls complaining about their teacher in this survey were of lower ability and less well behaved in lessons. Either way, there is clearly a mismatch between many students’ expectations and those of their teachers, from PE lessons. This implies an urgent need to question the appropriateness of teachers’ style of class/lesson management, lesson format and teaching strategies (DES/HMI 1989; Linford and Fazey cited in Graydon 1997).
As well as teachers inspiring girls’ enthusiasm for PE, famous sports women are also presumed to provide positive role models. However, the numbers of potential role models coming from outside the school environment for girls are limited due to the widely acknowledged lack of media coverage of women’s sports. Milosevic (1986) found that girls who were asked to list their favourite sporting personalities mentioned only two females compared with 62 males. However, only a small percentage (16%) of the girls in this survey said they would be encouraged in PE by “imagining I am a famous sportswoman”. Well over half (59%) said it would make no difference and a quarter (25%) said it would put them off PE! (see Appendix VII, Table 15). This finding is relevant in the light of findings that not only are women rarely given coverage in the sporting media but when they are it is often to the detriment of their feminine and (hetero)sexual image (e.g. Creedon 1994). This was exemplified by some of the recent appalling media treatment of the teenage tennis player Amelie Mauresmo who was described in the Evening Standard (February 1st 1999) as having “the jaw line of one of the earlier and long since extinct Simian sub-species”. It is hardly surprising that most teenage girls would seek not to be associated with such slanderous, insulting imagery. Indeed one of the comments on the questionnaire was,

My teacher makes me feel like I always have to act tuff around her because she says “are you going all girly on me and worrying about boys and make-up more”. So that puts me off a bit.

Activity/ies

Teenage girls may not want either to be associated with certain physical activities, not only for reasons of lack of (perceived) ability but also for reasons of maintaining their (heterosexual) feminine image. When asked to list activities taught in PE that they particularly like, almost three quarters (71%) of girls who are taught swimming in my sample said they especially liked it, over half (52%) said so for trampolining, and just under half (47%) of those girls who are taught basketball said they especially liked that activity. Substantial proportions of girls also expressed a liking for table tennis (39%), football (29%), and gymnastics (28%) (see Appendix VII, Table16). Lyons (1998) also found swimming and
basketball to be popular amongst the girls in her survey; in Milosevic’s (1986) study football was highly popular.

Badminton, gymnastics, table tennis and trampolining are traditionally associated with females therefore their popularity with girls is socially sanctioned as being gender-appropriate. However, the popularity of football and basketball run contrary to this stereotyped view and it is necessary to look further for explanations. It could be argued that basketball’s popularity is due to it offering girls an indoor sport, which uses their well practised and familiar netballing skills, and allows them to ‘break’ the restrictive rules of netball. This contention is supported by the reasoning of 5 girls in the survey that basketball is “fun” and of 6 girls that they are “good at it”. It is worth noting that football was also the most mentioned disliked activity. This information exposes dichotomised views amongst the group – it is very popular with some, and very unpopular with others. It may well be that while some girls feel empowered by the increasingly popular culture currently developing around football\(^8\) which is allowing female players to be slightly more accepted. Others are reluctant to break with traditionally assumed gender roles, in particular the assumptions surrounding gender-appropriate abilities and actual perceived abilities. More than one quarter of the girls who disliked football did so because they perceived themselves to be “not good at it”, for example, “… It’s more for boys and I can’t play”. (See also Appendix VII, Table 13; and my earlier discussion of ‘perceived self-confidence’). Gender-stereotypical reasons were also given for the dislike of other unpopular activities (see Appendix VII, Table13). Rugby was disliked because of “getting muddy” and its physical nature and ‘body management’ (although only taught in one school) was disliked principally because it was regarded as “unfeminine”, “… because we don’t want to be muscle women”.

It is relevant here to draw attention to the comparative results of Williams and Woodhouse’s (1996) survey since substantially more girls than boys said they disliked 5 of the 7 activity areas involved in PE. Only in the dance category did more boys ‘dislike’ the activity than girls. Similar results have been shown in the research of Earl and Stennett (1987) (cited in Van Wersch et al. 1992:60) who found that girls disliked “too much competition”; and of Dickenson and Sparkes (1988) who found that Year 11 girls preferred ‘health education’ and showed less preference for games than boys did. Over half the girls (51%) in this survey said they are encouraged by opportunities to be “artistic” or “creative” (see Appendix VII, Table 15) and similar findings were reported by Trew et al. (1999).
Whether it be for reasons of perceived abilities or assumed gender-appropriateness, or simply enjoyment (Trew et al 1999), *activities* were the most frequently given factor in this study affecting enjoyment or dislike of PE lessons (see Fig. 2). In connection with this, the ways in which each particular activity affects individual girls are wide ranging. For example some like the familiarity of netball and gymnastics while others like “… new stuff each week”. It seems that the need for *breadth* of provision and *choice* within it, discussed earlier in this paper, is supported by these findings. The physical activities that girls and young women choose to do outside and post-school which are often aesthetic and individual activities such as aerobics and swimming as opposed to competitive team games such as netball and hockey. In many cases however, provision at school does not reflect these needs (Sports Council 1998; Williams and Woodhouse 1996). This discontinuity represents inequity of opportunity for, and discrimination against, girls and young women (Scraton 1992; Talbot 1986; Williams and Woodhouse 1996). Wright and Dewar (1997:80) in their research into adult women’s physical activity also point out women who

… were now finding pleasure in a diverse range of activities very few of which were associated with the traditional activities taught in schools or taken up by school-aged girls…

Wright and Dewar talk of the “exhilaration” that women in their study have learned to find and enjoy in physical exertion. However, it is clear that this is not easily accessible (nor, as previously mentioned, necessarily attractive) to many teenage girls and young women as they are “locked within” their own femininities (McRobbie 1978) and lack of bodily confidence. Ironically it is the very *physicality* of sport and movement which furnishes this associated exhilaration and empowerment, and yet many of the physical aspects of PE compound girls’ negativity. In the final part of this section I turn to some of the physical components of girls’ experience in and enjoyment of PE; “keeping fit”, “getting hurt” aggressiveness, cold weather, and outdoor lessons.

**Physical Aspects of PE**

Aldridge (1998) found “keeping fit” to be a common reason amongst girls for enjoying PE, however, only 14 mentions were made of it as being a positive aspect of PE by the girls in this survey. The understandable fear of an asthma attack is more common than ever (7% of the
population in England and Wales, British Heart and Lung Foundation, verbal communication, 1999) and directly affects eight girls in my survey. It is discouraging to find that well over a third (28) are put off PE by “getting out of breath”, and only 4% (3) are encouraged by it (see Appendix VII, Table 15). Dickenson and Sparkes’ (1988) study supports this notion that the physical demands of an activity are a common reason for not liking it, as does Masons’ (1995) report on children’s involvement in sport. These findings signal young people’s poor understanding of, and low motivation levels towards, physical fitness with obvious implications for the PE profession.

Other physical aspects of PE that girls in this study did not enjoy include the risk of injury, aggression and rough physical contact. These are traditionally associated with – even celebrated within – ‘male’ sports, and therefore in boys’ PE. True to gender-appropriate form girls in the survey complained frequently about “getting hurt” and too much aggression (see Appendix VII, Tables 10 & 13). Examples of their comments include,

… injuries to arm are painful.

Some girls don’t like doing pe because they mite break a nail.

Once I fell over and hurt my leg. I never forgotten it…

Further, 44% (33) of the girls said that “being aggressive” put them off PE and only eight said it encouraged them. However it is important to make a careful distinction between ‘aggression’ and ‘competitiveness’ as they are all too often presumed to be one and the same (masculine) aspects of sport. Many more girls were encouraged by “being competitive” (45%) than by “being aggressive” (11%) (see Appendix VII, Table15). This notion serves as another reminder that whilst many girls are encouraged by “being artistic or creative” in PE (51% in my survey), there is no generic female sporting taste and many girls enjoy competition; some even enjoy being aggressive. For example, one student said she especially liked basketball because

… it’s a sport which you can be aggressive in and not get sent off!

… another because

… I can get rough and let my anger out.
Cold weather and outdoor lessons are perhaps the two most dreaded aspects of school PE; 81% (61) of the girls in this survey said that doing PE outside in cold weather put them off (see Appendix VII, Table 15). Clearly the cold, which was also mentioned negatively in response to open questions 27 times (see Appendix VII, Table 10), plays a major part in the culture of PE in this country. Until reasonable levels of funding become available for the building of school facilities, or at least the sharing of public facilities, schools with limited indoor space will presumably continue to put many girls off PE.

Also of note are the seven responses saying that doing PE outside even in “hot sunny weather” puts them off as are the seven responses to ‘open’ questions stating that doing PE outside was a negative factor – with no mention of weather (see Appendix VII, Table 15). These opinions together with the little research that has been done on space in relation to gender support my experience as a teacher by confirming that social biases “push girls into the less visible interior spaces” (Lewis cited in Wright 1996:72). Having already considered many of the challenges to girls’ confidence in, and enjoyment of, PE it becomes clearer why they identify ‘indoors’ as opposed to ‘outdoors’ as their territory and are happier doing PE there.

These responses to the arguably less enjoyable physical aspects of PE are perhaps not unexpected. However it is relevant to speculate on what predisposes girls to react in this way while boys presumably suffer the same (or worse) physical conditions and experiences. I make the case that whilst boys are not socially permitted to complain too loudly for fear of jeopardising their masculine image, girls are schooled to complain about physical hardships. While boys are taught to be proud of having survived physical ordeals and positively rewarded for such ‘macho’ behaviour (Connell et al. 1982), girls have their own emphasised femininity reconfirmed by being expected to complain about getting hurt, the cold weather or a teacher pushing them to run further.

**Recognising and Catering for Diversity**

There are clearly marked differences in what individual girls like and dislike, want and reject, with regard to PE which raise the issues of individuality and choice. Whilst the practicalities of attending to every individual’s wishes make it impossible to do exactly that, I identify
below four realistic challenges for the PE profession with regard to recognising and catering for diversity in individual girls’ needs. Firstly, to explore alternative ways of conceptualising and defining physical activity, movement, sport and PE that might “… challenge the hegemony of traditional games and sport” (Wright and Dewar 1997:94). The curriculum offered at present is rightly accused of

Privileging the experience of boys over girls and of those boys for whom competitive team games bring success, satisfaction and self-esteem. (Williams and Woodhouse 1996:212)

Many researchers in this field have criticised the current National Curriculum for PE for its bias and emphasis on traditional team games and their corresponding ‘masculine’ values (Hargreaves 1995; Penney and Evans 1999; Talbot 1993; Thomas 1993). Fox (1994:17) blames this unidimensional view of physical activity for presenting young people with a dichotomised decision: to do sport, or (for many girls) not, and suggests that “sport maybe the wrong type of physical activity to offer them”.

I propose then, that rather than allowing ‘sport’ and therefore ‘PE’ to become “dirty words” for girls and young women, that we utilise a “… broader conception of women’s involvement in physical exertion” (Deem and Gilroy 1998:104). This view is supported by Lyon’s (1998:34) conclusion that:

Even with less active pupils there is substantial evidence to suggest that a dynamic approach to curriculum content, particularly for older pupils, might lead to their commitment to physical education and sport that is currently lying dormant.

Similarly, Williams states that

Curriculum content should be scrutinised in terms of its relevance both as a learning opportunity and as a foundation for lifetime activity for both boys and girls. In many cases provision does not reflect. (1993: 129).

The second challenge emerging from research conducted on PE activities is to consider offering (more) choice to students in an effort to cater for diversity and encourage more positive attitudes towards PE from the whole range of individuals whom we teach (Hendry and Singer 1981; Lyons 1998). If the breadth of provision discussed above were to exist in lower years, girls (and boys) could be provided with the necessary experience and knowledge with which to make informed decisions about activity preferences in the later years of schooling. In order to facilitate this provision of choice meaningfully further work is needed
to explore the experiences and opinions of students, and an increased commitment to certain activity areas currently under-used in many schools.  

Thirdly, the findings of this study highlight some of the diverse weaknesses, strengths and needs of individual girls within PE. I make the case that our profession needs to enable and encourage teachers of PE to cater more efficiently to such broad ranging predispositions found within PE classes. (Woodhouse 1997:45) warns that

Our broad and balanced programmes will achieve little if pupils merely continue to reinforce their feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. 

While increasing pressures of class sizes and time available make this difficult, it is nevertheless crucial to rise to this challenge. To adopt “a different form of pedagogical consciousness” (Sparkes 1992:2) would include the encouragement of an increased awareness of innovative pedagogy and modes of delivery that may enhance girls’ enthusiasm and attainment. 

Fourthly, I support Evans and Clarke’s (1988:140) view that,

The official discourse [of PE] celebrates individualism, power, control and responsibility but remains largely silent on issues of class, race, gender and ability [and sexuality].

As a profession we need to challenge the oppressive gender (and ethnic and socio-economic) stereotypes and the heterosexual homophobia within sport and PE. We need to increase awareness of how class, ethnicity and ability, as well as the damaging dichotomy of hetero/homosexuality, affect individual girls’ experiences and needs in PE in particular and sport in general. 

Finally, there is a need to promote research with girls and women of all ages in all areas of the country and internationally; and to investigate more thoroughly how boys and men relate to sport and PE.  

By rising to these and other challenges we may go some way towards redressing the “chronic imbalance in young people’s [and some teachers’] perceptions and knowledge” (Milosevic 1986:60) and thereby encourage girls towards enthusiastic and prolonged involvement and attainment in sport. However, work to confront these challenges
is not without its own problems, tensions and paradoxes. In the final section I consider some of those arising from the methods used in this study.
CONSIDERING METHOD

... women’s lives involve a continual reality disjuncture ... there is a continual contradiction between women’s involvement in everyday experience and the ‘language of theory’. (Stanley and Wise 1983:164)

In order to make meaningful connections between experience and theory, feminist researchers have adopted the strategy of reflexivity. This allows the researcher’s relationships to her work, and to those researched within it, to become central to the research process, and to critically examine and analytically explore this process (Cook and Fonow, cited in Grace 1997). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) emphasise, in the same way that we analyse the subjects and cultures of our research we should examine and account for our own activities as researchers.

As a former teacher of secondary PE who is now researching the theoretical work developed around gender and physical education, I experience the disjuncture between what I know as a teacher and what I learn from theories in books. I have been encouraged in my efforts to make connections between these two worlds by other feminist writers such as Clarke and Humberstone (1997), Maynard and Purvis (1994) and Stanley and Wise (1983) and to reflect on the research process in which I am involved.

In this section of the paper I take on this challenge of ‘locating’ myself by briefly exploring one aspect of my method in a reflexive manner – my presentation to, introduction to and manner with the girls who were the respondents in this study. I continue by discussing other aspects of feminist research methods and methodologies which have influenced this project. Finally, I conclude by adopting a ‘non-doctrinaire’ stance (Bryman 1988) and by agreeing with other writers who suggest that the most fruitful approach to conducting good research in gender and PE may be to combine quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

Reflexively Locating Myself – ‘The Researcher’

Feminist researchers argue that one aspect of reflexivity is the need for a researcher to ‘locate’ herself within her work, to clarify and acknowledge what she brings to it – “where she is coming from” – and what influence that may bear on the findings. This opposes the tradition
of ‘scientific method’ in which the researcher is supposed to remain detached and
uninfluential in the process, and therefore in the findings, of the research. Stanley and Wise
(1983:162) illustrate well how “Personhood cannot be left behind”. They argue that we must,
as researchers, “make ourselves vulnerable, not hide behind what [we] are supposed to think
and feel” (1983:168). Below I use an example from my research which by exposing this
vulnerability to the reader shows how the difficulties and compensations involved in the
research process can contribute to rich and dynamic discussions about “what is research?”
(Maynard and Purvis 1994).

As stated in the Method section of this paper, I prepared an ‘Introduction’ to be delivered to
all students before completion of the questionnaire (see Appendix II). In it I stated clearly
that I had been a teacher and that I was now a university student. My presence made it clear
that I am a woman, and it could be presumed that I had been a school student in the past. I
was excited about breaking down the social barriers that exist in schools between adults
(teachers) and students. I introduced myself using (if rather sheepishly at first) my first name
as well as my surname and wore smart but casual clothes – not the tracksuit and trainers in
which I am accustomed to presenting myself in school scenarios. I felt liberated by this shift
of social position, yet simultaneously restricted: I was still physically standing in front of a
class of girls telling them what to do!

However, as I progressed through the five questionnaire administration sessions I found my
‘location’ changing slightly each time. My introduction to the girls developed from the rather
formal explanation of “what I am doing” to a more personal and reciprocal approach saying
“you can really help me with my work”. This happened for several reasons and had various
effects on my approach which I have since explored and tried to rationalise. Firstly, as I saw
the questionnaire was ‘working’ I began to relax and became braver about ‘asking’ the girls
not ‘telling’ them, thus breaking down the usual teacher/student discourse to some degree.
Secondly, it occurred to me that I might get better quality, richer answers if the students felt
encouraged by me in some way and so I began to portray myself in a more friendly, and
eventually humorous, way. Thirdly, I realised that asking the teacher for time alone with the
students before completion of the questionnaire provided a valuable opportunity to distance
myself from the teacher and imply I was on the students ‘side’. During these times I
emphasised to the girls that I too had been a 13 year old school student who had had strong
feelings about PE, that I understood ‘where they were coming from’ and that I would
appreciate their *honest* opinions whether that meant responding positively or negatively about their teacher or PE department. In this way I located myself not only as a teacher and as a mature student, but also as a *once 13 year old girl* thus identifying myself more strongly with them than with their teachers.

However, the question of the teachers’ requested absence played on my mind. It had clearly been pivotal in my change of approach and yet aroused in me feelings of disloyalty to the teachers. They were friends and colleagues of mine who had been approachable and generous enough to open up their departments and devote time and energy to this project. I felt uneasy at the prospect of alienating them within it as I strived to gain “good” responses from the students. What right had I to take the students’ side and imply that they may have ‘bad’ things to say about people who like and trust me? Further, could/should I expect the students to trust me as an outsider, a non-collaborator (with the teacher) and tell me their real opinions and possibly sensitive feelings?

I was experiencing the position of power that one inevitably holds as the researcher (see Humberstone 1997; Maynard and Purvis 1994; Ramazanoglu 1989; Scraton 1997; Skeggs 1997) and the confusions and tensions that arise from it. Although I believed I had gone some way to shedding the power I had as a *teacher* in relation to these girls, I had had bestowed upon me a different – yet still unwelcome – power as a *researcher*. Further, I had assumed some form of power in relation to the teachers involved as I was no longer identifiable simply as ‘one of them’. This double, or multiple, identity is not unfamiliar to many of us as women who abide with the “self-estrangement which lies close to the heart of the feminine condition itself”, (Bartky cited in Wright and Dewar 1997:94).

For the above reasons, and as a result of conducting this research, I support the arguments of feminist ethnographers (amongst others) who, by foregrounding ‘intellectual’ autobiographical analyses of *what it is actually like* to do research, provide useful insights into issues often ignored in conventional methodology textbooks.
Other Influences on My Approach to This Research

There are many other issues raised by discussions of qualitative research that have borne influence and indeed radically changed my approach to this study. For reasons of space I cannot reflect here on my ‘journey’ in full, however it is important to draw attention to some sources of freedom and support – call it ‘inspiration’ – that have helped me confront the ambiguities caused by the disjunctures between empirical and theoretical research, also between the practice of teaching and the process of research.

Firstly, I found reassurance in the discussions of Stanley and Wise (1983) that feminist beliefs, such as I had held as a practising teacher, can and should be taken seriously in academic feminism by integrating them within the research. Thus feminist principles became an integral part of the process of researching and writing up this project. Secondly, the work of Garfinkel (1984:9), amongst others, encouraged me to value ‘everyday actions’ (in this case the responses by the girls on the questionnaires) and to make them accessible and interesting to study by treating their properties as “anthropologically strange”. This gave added emphasis to the ‘voices’ of the girls as it allowed me to see each response as important and useful whether or not it fitted with my previous beliefs, explanations, or hunches. Thirdly, this increasing awareness and acceptance of the importance of the diversity of individual responses together with a recognition that there is no generic teenage girl (just as there is no generic researcher) prompted in me an awareness of marginalising some of the girls in the study. Just as Dewar (1993:213) demonstrates how “… we have tended to uncritically presume that the interests and needs of a few women are in fact the interests and needs of all women”, I realised that by focusing on negativity I was in danger of “othering” girls in my study who enjoy PE. This, in turn, was likely to limit my understanding and omit relevant and valuable input from my learning. Conversely, whilst recognising that all girls are different, in terms of their ethnicity, class, body size, the school they attend, their relationship to their own femininity, their actual and self–perceived ability, and so on, at many times throughout the research, I felt compelled to recognise the oppression that the girls share as females. I was frequently reminded of the immediate importance and relevance to these girls of their own collective identities and sub–cultures, and that this should not be overlooked by the researcher. I concur with Ann Phoenix (1994:70) that researchers must “… recognise differences and commonalities between people who are socially constructed as belonging to the same group as well as across groups”, (emphasis added).
Fourthly, these adaptations and the flexibility that developed as the research progressed were supported by the concept of ‘grounded theory’ (see Scraton and Flintoff 1992). These writers, amongst others, advocate movement between data and theoretical thinking which allows theory to grow out of the experience which in turn helps develop feminist theoretical thinking. Also valuable was the advice of Strauss and Corbin (1990:199) to use memos and diagrams to “… assist your movement away from the data to abstract thinking, then in returning to the data ground these abstractions in reality” (see Fig. 2).

Finally, it became clear to me that if we are to meet John Evans’ (1992:237) challenge of doing “… justice to the complexity of the thinking and actions of those whom we study”, we need to know more than quantitative research can provide. Quantitative research methods limit what we can learn about “… how, in minute detail, all the facets of the oppressions of all women occur … the mechanisms, the experiences, the behaviours, the looks, the conversations, which are involved” (Stanley and Wise 1983:167). During the process of this research, I have found many contradictions and limitations in my quantitative method.

Quantitative/Qualitative Research

One contradiction that became apparent in this research was that whilst I had asked all respondents the same questions in the same order, I began to realise that I had varied how I had asked them. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:7) point out “… the same physical stimulus can mean different things to different people and, indeed to the same person at different times”. These girls’ understandings and interpretations are open to question, as are my own, because moods, feelings, values and involvements vary (Skeggs 1997). I began to look past the incommensurability of my statistical analysis as I realised it could not provide a “single picture of the truth” (Skeggs 1994:4). And I saw a need for more nuanced information. I began to recognise the respondents as subjects not objects, with their own agency and volition, and wonder if I could really understand what it might be like for them (see Stanley and Wise 1983).

This process presented me with many ‘why?’ questions that I could not answer with my statistics. I now feel I need to abandon my attempted position as a ‘fly on the wall’ and having counted the girls’ responses I now need to problematise them in an effort to go some
way to better understanding them. I agree that both quantitative and qualitative research methods have much to offer the work of feminist researchers in the field of physical education and that in many cases this may be achieved by combining quantitative and qualitative work (see Graydon 1997; Griffin 1989; Maynard and Purvis 1994; Silverman 1985). Whilst qualitative methods are not needed for some quick and effective ways of accruing the generalisations that quantitative techniques can produce, the two perspectives used in combination could “… complement and inform each other so that a fuller picture would emerge” (Graydon 1997:76).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Many of the changes being made to research in girls’ PE by (feminist) qualitative approaches have much to offer the somewhat conservative practice of teaching girls (and boys) PE. The reflexivity, thoughtfulness and awareness valued in qualitative research could transpose readily into reflexivity, thoughtfulness and awareness in teaching situations. If these advances could be shared between researchers and teachers the interpersonal subtleties of teaching could be more readily identified and valued by teachers. By problematising the intentionalities of teaching we may facilitate a sociology of education which requires that we

… examine the social bases of our conventional practices, that we explore the decision making process, the criteria which underpin curricula selections, the rationales which are used to justify and legalise them, and locate these not only within epistemic communities but also the particular school organisational, social and political contexts of which they are part. (Evans and Davies 1986: 27)

In these ways we could begin to make PE a less contradictory, (hetero-)sexist and alienating experience not only for girls, but also for some of their male classmates, and their teachers as well.
NOTES

1 See Dewar (1991) for a critical discussion of the issues surrounding the concept of ‘giving voice’.
2 The wording of questions 1-8 directs attention to the PE lessons of “last term” which refers to September – December 1998 (the first term of the students’ Year 9). This timescale was designed to give the students a specific focus (i.e. a time to talk about) as their two and a half years at their present schools will have involved many experiences they have already forgotten.
3 See Cohen and Manion (1994) for excellent guidance on clustering and categorisation in data preparation.
4 The areas of ‘forgotten kit’ and illness/injuries as reasons for not taking part in PE lessons necessarily remain grey areas for the purpose of this study and leave open to discussion the extent to which the reasons given were entirely accurate.
5 These responses were made in the January of these students’ Year 9 before any information regarding options would have been given out. Therefore it can be assumed that the setting of other subjects against PE in option ‘columns’ will not have had any effect on their responses at this stage in their thinking.
6 Scraton’s (1992) and Tinson’s (1998) research show the issue of showering to be a contentious one amongst many secondary age girls and their PE teachers. However, this is usually assumed to represent a negative aspect of PE lessons that causes embarrassment and unhappiness.
7 See Deem (1984); Spender (1983); and Stanworth (1983) for informative accounts of teachers’ tendency to spend proportionately more time and attention on boys when teaching mixed sex classes.
8 See, for example Duke and Colley (1996).
9 See, for example, Humberstone’s (1995) arguments for Outdoor and Adventure activities.
10 There is much good practice already in these areas both in teaching and in research, the importance of which should not be denied. Examples include: Burkhardt (1986); Clarke (1997); Griffin (1986) and Griffin and Genasci (1990) on combating homophobia in PE. Bourdieu (1978); and Shilling (1993) on social class and PE. Khan (1986); Lyons (1986); and Zaman (1997) on race and ethnicity in girls’ PE. Barton (1993); Graydon (1997); and Halliday (1993) on ability/disability. Williams (1993) on primary girls’ PE. Scraton (1997) on international perspectives of women in sport; (DeKnop et al. 1996) on youth and sport around the world; and (Dunning et al. 1993) on how international sports developments affected by issues such as gender.
11 This is clearly an area for further study as the experiences and concerns of ‘sporty’ girls and women have their own form of oppression as “deviants”, “tomboys” and “cross sex” behavers (Hall 1996).
QUESTIONNAIRE

How You Feel About PE

- Please answer the following questions as fully and carefully as you can.
- Please answer honestly - your answers will be seen only by me.
- Remember there are no right or wrong answers - I am interested in finding out about your opinions.
- If you have any questions please put up your hand, and I will try to help you.

HAVE YOU BEEN AT THIS SCHOOL SINCE YEAR 7? (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐

Section A. THINKING ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF 'PE' LESSONS LAST TERM

1. How did you feel about PE lessons last term? Please tick one of the following answers:
   - I always enjoyed them ☐
   - I hardly ever enjoyed them ☐
   - I nearly always enjoyed them ☐
   - I never enjoyed them ☐
   - I sometimes enjoyed them, sometimes not ☐

2. Why did you feel like this? (You do not have to answer in full sentences) ..........................................
   ........................................................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................................................

3. How hard did you try in your PE lessons last term? Please tick one of the following:
   - I always tried hard ☐
   - I didn't try hard very often ☐
   - I usually tried hard ☐
   - I didn't ever try hard ☐
   - I sometimes tried hard, sometimes not ☐

4. What were the reasons you did or didn't try hard? .................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................................................

5. Did you bring your PE kit to every PE lesson last term? Please tick one of these answers:
   - I brought my PE kit to every lesson ☐
   - I didn't bring it to many lessons ☐
   - I brought it to most lessons ☐
   - I didn't bring it to one lesson ☐
   - I brought it to some lessons ☐

6. If you did not bring your PE kit to every lesson, please explain why:........................................
   ........................................................................................................................................................................

7. How many PE lessons did you take part in last term? Please tick one of the following answers:
   - I took part in every PE lesson last term ☐
   - I did not take part in many lessons ☐
   - I took part in most lessons ☐
   - I did not take part in any lessons ☐
   - I took part in about half the lessons ☐
8. If you missed one or more lessons please explain.................................................................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

9. Do you have (or have you had) any long term illness or disability e.g. Asthma that has affected your participation in, or enjoyment of PE lessons?

Yes □  No □  If yes, please describe below
...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

10. Would you say you were good at PE in general?

Good □  Depends on activity □  Poor □

Section B.  THINGS THAT ENCOURAGE YOU OR PUT YOU OFF PE
1. Please tick once for each of the following according to how you feel about them in PE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Encourages me to do PE</th>
<th>Doesn’t make difference</th>
<th>Puts me off PE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with others (not friends)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on my own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting out of breath</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being competitive (trying to win)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being artistic or creative (eg gymnastics or dance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My PE teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing sport in front of other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a class with boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a class with just girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a female teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a male teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining I am a famous sportswoman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My best friends’ attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing PE outside in cold weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing PE outside in hot &amp; sunny weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing PE inside in cold weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing PE inside in hot &amp; sunny weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing the <strong>proper PE kit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carrying</strong> my kit to school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Following rules</strong> about jewellery, hair, laces etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing <strong>games</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having <strong>showers</strong> (leave blank if you have never had to have them at your school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please add anything you would like to here about what encourages you or puts you off PE:
...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
2. Please state if you agree with, disagree with or don’t know about the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In PE I...</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make new friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control my body shape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to keep fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to keep healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn how to control my body shape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find out about clubs and activities in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get ideas for sport to do outside school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get tired out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel good because I have done exercise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel bad because I feel tired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please add anything you would like to here about your feelings towards your PE lessons.
..................................................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................................................

4. Are there any activities you do in PE lessons that you especially like? Please list up to three and say why you like them. (Write 'none' if you really don’t have any).

Activity ................................................ Reason ...........................................................................
Activity ................................................ Reason ...........................................................................
Activity ................................................ Reason ...........................................................................

5. Are there any activities you do in PE lessons, that you especially do not like? Please list up to three and say why you do not like them. (Write 'none' if you really don’t have any).

Activity ................................................ Reason ...........................................................................
Activity ................................................ Reason ...........................................................................
Activity ................................................ Reason ...........................................................................
Section C  HOW FEELING TOWARDS PE LESSONS MAY CHANGE OVER TIME.

1. You may feel differently about PE now compared to when you were younger. Please tick the boxes that apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I enjoyed PE the most in</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
<th>Equally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tried the hardest in PE in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I brought my PE kit most regularly in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I took part in PE the most in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Have you ever been to a lunchtime or after-school sport club at your school?

Yes  ☐  No  ☐

If you answered 'yes', state which activity/ies and whether you still go this year?

Activity ..........................................Still go in year 9? (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

Activity ..........................................Still go in year 9? (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

Activity ..........................................Still go in year 9? (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

Activity ..........................................Still go in year 9? (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

Activity ..........................................Still go in year 9? (tick one) Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

If you have been to more lunchtime or after-school sports clubs write them in below:

...........................................................................................................................................................................

3. GCSE (EXAM) PE

Does your school offer GCSE PE in year 10?  Yes ☐  No ☐  Don’t Know ☐

If your school does offer GCSE PE will you choose it?  Yes ☐  No ☐  Don’t Know ☐

Section D. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD ON THE TOPIC OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ? (If there is, please write it in the section below).

...........................................................................................................................................................................

FINALLY...

• PLEASE CHECK THAT YOU HAVE ANSWERED ALL THE QUESTIONS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.
• PLEASE CLOSE THE QUESTIONNAIRE PAPER AND SIT QUIETLY UNTIL EVERYONE HAS FINISHED.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE TIME YOU HAVE TAKEN TO DO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
### APPENDIX VII  RESULTS TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>11%</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>31%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly always</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes/Sometimes not</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Enjoyment of PE lessons last term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Given</th>
<th>Enjoying</th>
<th>Not enjoying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity/ies</td>
<td>30 67%</td>
<td>32 38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/style of lesson</td>
<td>4 9%</td>
<td>14 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>9 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Boring’</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>7 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own ability</td>
<td>4 9%</td>
<td>6 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE kit</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>4 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/grouping factors/friends</td>
<td>3 7%</td>
<td>3 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>2 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-consciousness</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>2 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
<td>5 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>45 85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Reasons given for enjoying/not enjoying PE lessons last term

| Always tries hard                         | 16 21% | Positive  | 48 64% |
| Usually tries hard                        | 32 43% |           |       |
| Sometimes/Sometimes not                   | 20 27% | Sometimes | 20 27% |
| Not very often                            | 7 9%   | Negative  | 7 9%  |
| Never tries hard                          | 0 0%   |           |       |

Table 3. Effort made in PE lessons last term

| Every lesson                              | 41 55% | Positive  | 65 87% |
| Most lessons                              | 24 32% |           |       |
| Some lessons                              | 7 9%   | Sometimes | 7 9%  |
| Not many lessons                          | 3 4%   |           |       |
| Not one lesson                            | 0 0%   | Negative  | 3 4%  |

Table 4. How often girls brought PE kit to PE lessons last term
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Engagement</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every lesson</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most lessons</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About half the lessons</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>About Half</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not many lessons</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No lessons</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5. The number of PE lessons taken part in last term**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness/injury, absence or other ‘legitimate’ reason</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid the lesson</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgotten kit</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6. Reasons for missing PE lessons last term**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgot it</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid doing PE*</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured/ill</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t like activity in PE lesson*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much to carry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed and unfit* (therefore didn’t want to take part)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad relationship with teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* categorised as ‘avoiding lesson’

**Table 7. Reasons for not bringing kit to PE lessons last term**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons Given</th>
<th>Trying Hard</th>
<th>Not Trying Hard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity/ies</td>
<td>13 28%</td>
<td>15 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenness to achieve</td>
<td>21 46%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/style of lesson</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>8 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of PE</td>
<td>7 15%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of PE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood/laziness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own ability</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Boring’</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill/injured</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep fit</td>
<td>2 4%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>46 100%</td>
<td>49 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 8. Reasons given for trying hard/not trying hard in PE lessons last term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Boring’</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own ‘poor’ ability</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too aggressive/Risk of injury</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical exertion/Getting out of breath</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Style of lesson</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get muddy/dirty</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-consciousness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor lessons</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys teasing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9. Reasons given for not liking particular activities in PE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/lesson style</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own (poor) ability</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Boring’</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity/ies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold outside</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of PE</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kit</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed sex groups</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical exertion</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressiveness/risk of injury</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>418</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10. Negative factors in PE lessons mentioned in response to open questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on activity</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11. Whether girls thought they were good at PE in general or not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Fun’</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own (good) ability</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12. Reasons given for especially liking particular activities in PE lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Own poor ability</th>
<th>‘Boring’</th>
<th>Get Muddy</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Aggressiveness/Risk of injury</th>
<th>Unfeminine</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Manage-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Reasons given for not liking the least popular activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Encourages</th>
<th>Makes no difference</th>
<th>‘Puts off’</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with friends</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best friends’ attitudes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on own</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing sport in front of others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a class with boys</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a class with just girls</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a female teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a male teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their PE teacher</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining they are a famous sportswoman</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting out of breath</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aggressive</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14. Fifty two students had previously attended 9 different extra-curricular sports clubs/activities at their schools. These figures show how many still attend (or not)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of those offered who ‘like’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trampolining</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table Tennis</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15. Factors that encourage, make no difference to, or ‘put off’ girls in PE lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being competitive</th>
<th>34 45%</th>
<th>29 39%</th>
<th>12 16%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being artistic or creative</td>
<td>38 51%</td>
<td>25 33%</td>
<td>11 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing games</td>
<td>36 48%</td>
<td>35 47%</td>
<td>4 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing the correct kit</td>
<td>5 7%</td>
<td>48 64%</td>
<td>20 27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following rules about jewellery, hair, laces etc.</td>
<td>3 4%</td>
<td>47 63%</td>
<td>23 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing PE outside in cold weather</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>12 16%</td>
<td>61 81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing PE outside in hot sunny weather</td>
<td>43 57%</td>
<td>23 31%</td>
<td>7 9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16. Activities especially liked by girls as a percentage of the number of girls offered that activity in PE lessons
REFERENCES


Burkhardt, J. (1986) “‘Between you and me I think dance is for poofers’. Balancing the genders in dance”, in L. Milosevic (ed.) Fairplay, Gender and Physical Education, Leeds City Council, Department of Education.


